

## THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES OF OUR LADY

### THE SISTERS WHO SERVED IN THE NORTH AMERICAN PROVINCE

#### **Introduction**

Catholic communities of Sisters devoted to the care of the sick were most instrumental in developing the overall hospital system in America. They heavily influenced the formation of community hospitals, often making unbelievable sacrifices in service to the sick and needy. Perhaps one of the most famous was the ministry of Mother Marianne of Molakai, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis, who gave herself in service to the lepers in Hawaii, working with them for 29 years until her death.

This publication relates the remarkable contribution of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, North American Province, to the development of community hospitals in Louisiana. Known today as the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, six Franciscan Sisters came to Louisiana in 1911 to establish a community hospital in the Alexandria area, thus beginning the odyssey of Franciscan service to the sick people of Louisiana.

Interestingly, the first group of Catholic Sisters to come to America were members of the Ursuline Order of France. They came to New Orleans in 1727, opening the first Catholic hospital in the United States in 1728. Countless communities of Catholic Sisters followed them. Few Sisters are famous. Most Sisters lived and died obscurely, secure in their belief, giving themselves freely and willingly to the cause of serving the sick.

The Franciscan Sisters of Calais, as they were known when they arrived in Louisiana in 1911, followed in their footsteps, bringing health care to the Monroe, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette areas of Louisiana. This publication is a brief history of the indomitable women who gave themselves to the service of the sick in these three areas of Louisiana.

#### **The Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady**

The Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, one of many orders of Catholic Sisters operating world wide, began in 1854. Formed from seven autonomous groups of Franciscan Sisters in France, they organized themselves into a cohesive group, receiving official recognition from the Franciscan First Order. At the time, they called themselves the Franciscan Sisters of Calais, their headquarters being located in Calais, France.

Under the leadership of Mother Louise Mabile, the first Superior General of the order, the organization grew rapidly. During the first 10 years, 175 postulants were received, 115 novices were admitted, and 12 new convents were opened. With the impetus of a rapidly growing organization, the Franciscans expanded into Europe, Asia, and North and South America. The United States group, called the North American Province, operated solely in Louisiana.

The Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), a gentle saint who left a life of riches to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to live out the Gospel through service to the sick and the needy. The Sisters of the Franciscan Third Order were first linked with hospitals in the mid-13th century in France. In subsequent years they spread out across Europe, building schools, convents, hospitals, and orphanages. The centuries brought the order many hardships, but neither war nor religious persecution dimmed the love, faith and hope that called these women to the sisterhood. At the time the United States operation in Louisiana began, the Franciscan Sisters of Calais numbered 800 members in 36 houses in France as well as missions in 24 countries.

In 1911 six courageous women, members of the Franciscan Sisters of Calais in France, arrived in Pineville, Louisiana to open a sanitarium for the care of the sick. When that effort did not work out, they were invited to go to Monroe, Louisiana for the purpose of opening a sanitarium. Monroe was a community in northeast Louisiana where only a small portion of the population was Catholic, but that did not deter the sisters. They had come to minister to the sick, and the Monroe community needed them.

Thus began a tale of a remarkable group of women from foreign lands, repeated many times over by groups of sisters who pioneered health care institutions in innumerable United States communities. Working with community leaders in Monroe, and a retired Catholic priest, Monsignor Enaut, the Franciscan Sisters opened St. Francis Sanitarium in 1913.

The initial group of Sisters was headed by a determined and astute Irish lady, Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, who not only opened St. Francis in Monroe, but 10 years later in 1923, she opened Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Lake, as the sanitarium was called, came into being in a similar manner. Under the sponsorship of local clergy and lay leaders in the community, Our Lady of the Lake opened its doors in 1923. The third hospital in the Franciscan system in Louisiana, Our Lady of Lourdes in Lafayette, Louisiana came into being much later, opening its doors in 1949.

In the 90 years that the Franciscans have been in Louisiana, approximately 140 Sisters have served in the three hospitals. The number who have served is fluid. In the early days records were handwritten, files were fragile, and the principal focus was tending to the sick, so a few Sisters may have been missed. The early Sisters were trained in France at the Mother House, and the majority who served in Louisiana were Irish. Mother de Bethanie herself was Irish. Some came from France, and several were of various nationalities. The first American Sister, Sister Mary Elizabeth Gibbens of Baton Rouge, began service in 1943 when the U.S. novitiate opened. With the opening of a novitiate in Baton Rouge numerous American women were recruited. Although many did not remain in the order, some gave valuable service as Sisters, and many have continued to serve the sick in health care occupations, even though they are no longer active as Franciscans.

The North American Province of the Franciscan Missionaries is headquartered in Baton Rouge. It is the parent organization of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System, which is a non-profit corporation, organized under the laws of the state of Louisiana. It is owned

by the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, North American Province, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The North American Province, in turn, is a constituent group of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, Paris, France, which conducts health and education programs in 17 countries around the world. The world-wide organization operates under a mandate of the Roman Catholic Church. Through their sponsored facilities, the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady are committed to carrying out the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, while promoting the dignity and wholeness of the human person. With total assets of approximately \$1.2 billion, FMOL Health System is committed to greater participation of the people whom they serve in the decision making process in order to ensure that quality health care is delivered to them.

The FMOL Health System operates three major medical centers in the state of Louisiana. The oldest hospital is St. Francis Medical Center in Monroe, which serves northeast Louisiana. Opened in 1913 with a capacity of 75 beds, SFMC has grown to become a major health care facility known for its exceptional service. Today it has 450 beds, employs a staff of almost 1500 full time employees and has approximately 300 physicians on its staff. A leader among health centers in Louisiana, St. Francis was first to develop an endobronchial radiation treatment program, opened the first skilled care unit in Louisiana, and was the first to develop CPR training in the state. In addition to its health care affiliates in Monroe, SFMC is part of the Northeast Louisiana Health Network, providing for more efficient and cost effective health services to the people of that area.

Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center is the predominant institution in health care in the Greater Baton Rouge Area. It is also the largest privately owned medical center in Louisiana, with 852 licensed beds. Opened in 1923, the Lake has grown from its modest beginning to a major player in health care, not only in its geographical area, but to Central America and the Caribbean as well. Relocated to a larger campus in 1978, Our Lady of the Lake in any given year treats about 25,000 patients in the hospital, and serves about 350,000 persons through outpatient locations. It has a complement of almost 900 physicians and 3,000 staff members. The Lake maintains an affiliation with Woman's Hospital in Baton Rouge to further provide for the special needs of women. The Lake also operates two nursing homes, has an affiliated cancer facility adjacent to the main hospital, and operates a number of outpatient services on its campus, as well as in outlying locations. Additionally, on its campus, the Lake also operates a community college. Stemming originally from its nursing school, the college now offers training in a broad range of ancillary health disciplines and general studies on its campus.

Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center has provided quality health care to the people of Acadiana since 1949. Lourdes is one of the most respected health care centers in southwest Louisiana, with 293 licensed beds, almost 1,500 employees, and over 400 physicians on staff. Lourdes is expanding to meet the growing needs of the area, including the opening of St. Francis Plaza, which houses physician offices and a modern Outpatient Rehabilitation and Health Promotion Center, complete with an adjacent parking tower. In a given year Lourdes will treat around 11,000 persons in the hospital and 30,000 persons in the emergency room. In its 50-year history, Lourdes has made significant strides, both in service and quality. As an example, Lourdes is rated in the top 100 hospitals in the United States, both in cardiac bypass surgery and interventional cardiology. Only 34 hospitals can attest to this distinction in both of these areas of

service.

Looking at the development of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System in retrospect, it has grown from a small hands-on operation run solely by the Sisters to a major health system operating three large medical centers in the state of Louisiana. This change occurred in 90 years of dedicated work by a gallant, highly motivated group of Franciscan Sisters who came to Louisiana and devoted their lives to helping the sick in Louisiana. What is most remarkable is that they were able to move from a small operation in which they gave direct care to a major health system where they are in fact the corporate owners of a large, complex medical corporation with assets of \$1.2 billion.

Those Franciscan Sisters who had the responsibility for and/or participated in the development of the North American Province and the FMOL Health System are listed below.

General Superiors of the world-wide congregation who had administrative and supervisory control over the North American Province, domiciled in Louisiana:

Mother Louise Mabile (Founding Mother Superior), 1854-64

Mother Marie Anna, 1904-15

Mother Anastasia, 1915-19

Mother Osmane, 1919-45

Mother Marguerite of the Cross, 1946-58

Mother Agatha, 1958-76

Mother Alice Portela, 1976-88

Sister Margarida Vasques, 1988-94

Sister Brigitte des Haulles, 1994-2000

Founding Sisters who came in 1911 to begin the work in Louisiana:

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley

Sister Angelique van Bockstale

Sister Brigida Comerford

Sister Marie Hortulane Arnould

Sister Margaret Gaffney

Sister Saint Joseph Martin

Sisters who served as Provincials (Superiors) of the North American Province:

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, 1911-29

Mother Henrietta Didesse, 1929-60

Mother Gertrude Hennessey, 1960-78

Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1978-86

Sister Pauline O'Sullivan, 1986-94

Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1994-2002

Sisters from the North American Province who have served on the General Council in Paris:

Sister Jerome Crowley, 1976-82

Sister Barbara Arceneaux, 1986-94

Sister Martha Ann Abshire, 1994-1999

## **The Sisters**

In one way or another, about 140 Franciscan Sisters have participated in the growth and development of the North American Province. The Sisters who led the order from its headquarters in France had an impact through the Sisters they missioned to Louisiana. In the earlier days, they appointed the Sisters who directed the work. They assigned Sisters to serve on the hospital staffs, and they exercised general supervision over the work of the Sisters, visiting from time to time to inspect what was being done in Louisiana.

With the changes that occurred in the post-World War II days, the modicum of control changed. In the 1960s and 70s the democratization of the order caused a dramatic shift in focus. The selection of Sisters for leadership positions in the order changed to an elected basis. Consequently, the Sisters in the North American Province now elect their leaders who form a Provincial Council of three to five Sisters. Together they preside over the affairs of the North American Province, located in Louisiana. In this structure, the Provincial Council is responsible to the General Superior and her Council in Paris.

The North American Province in turn operates its facilities through its own Provincial Council, and it has a responsibility to account for the management of its affairs to the General Superior of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in Paris.

In the early days the Sisters were recruited by the Generalate office in France, first from Calais where the Mother House was located, and later in Paris after World War II when the central office moved there. From the first contingent who came to Louisiana in 1911 until the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s when the North American Province opened its own novitiate, all but one of the Sisters had come from Europe. Sr. Mary Elizabeth Gibbens was the first Native American woman to serve as a Franciscan Sister in the North American Province.

Beginning with the early days in 1911 until the 1960s, the majority of Sisters in Louisiana came from Ireland. Some French Sisters joined them, several playing very prominent roles. The Irish Sisters, consequently, have played a most important role in the North American Province. Without them, the North American Province would probably not have become a reality.

Development of the North American Province novitiate program meant recruiting young women to join the order, educating them through the novitiate, and accepting them into the order. The Sisters entered into this process with full vigor. A large number of young women entered the novitiate at Maryville Convent in Baton Rouge. During the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, over fifty women took first vows and were assigned to positions in the three hospitals.

Unfortunately, the changing times in the United States led many of them to leave the order, using their education as a Franciscan to meet their personal objectives in life. Today there are eleven American women who are active in the order.

For the most part, the Irish Sisters who came to America to serve in Louisiana remained here. Today there are eight still active. Three Vietnamese Americans, Sister Ann Catherine

Nguyen, Sister Kim Le Nguyen, and Sister Uyen Vu, are among the most recent additions to the sisterhood, along with Sister Rita Lanie, a Louisiana native.

Information about many of the earlier Sisters was scanty. Information on about half of the Sisters was found, and brief stories of each of these follow:

### **Sister Althea Jonis**

With her brave heart and sunny disposition, Sister Althea Jonis brought life and new hope to the sick and hungry people of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. To most of us, life in Haiti – with its heat, dirty water and primitive conditions – would be unendurable. To Sister Althea, it was where God called her to be and that was more than enough.

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, Althea Jonis was drawn to God and healing at an early age. At six years old, she admired the kindly Sisters visiting and caring for her grandmother, who was ill with cancer.

“After that,” she said, “it was all the Lord’s doing. He almost takes you by the hand to lead you. You just have to be open to where He wants you to go.”

It was a long way to Aquin, Haiti, but Sister Althea was carefully prepared for the journey. In 1966, she entered the University of Texas medical branch to study occupational therapy. A year later, after considering several different religious orders, she joined the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. “I appreciated the personal, warm touch of the Franciscans,” she said. “I recognized the Franciscan spirit of caring and love of the Lord coming through.”

During the next 20 years of ministry in Monroe, Lafayette and Baton Rouge, Sister Althea graduated from the University of Texas with a Bachelor’s Degree in Occupational Therapy, obtained a Master’s Degree in Health Administration from the University of Notre Dame du Lac and worked in virtually every level of health care. As a nurse’s aide, she learned to appreciate everybody’s work and effort. As administrator of Ollie Steele Burden Manor, where she hugged each patient every morning, she learned to build teams and work in cooperation with others. She served on Our Lady of the Lake Board of Directors for five years.

Then the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady decided to open a mission serving “the poorest of the poor,” which proved to be in Haiti. Sister Althea’s studies qualified her as a doctor in that country, and her broad experience in health care, along with Sister Martha Ann Abshire’s nursing skills, enabled them to set up a thriving medical mission.

Whether she was riding a donkey up the mountain, wielding a machete to hack a path through the jungle, or holding long office hours in the clinic at St. Helene, Sister Althea was happy to do God’s work by serving others.

It was a busy life. Each morning she rose at 4:30 a.m. to spend time in prayer and meditation. On some days she treated the sick in prison. On others she taught the women of

Aquin the principles of business or helped their children get an education, nutritional services and food. Every day Sister Althea was the doctor, dentist and spiritual advisor-on-call to thousands of people who call her “mother.”

In the last several years Sister Althea began working on a hospice for Haitian children suffering from severe malnutrition. She gained the financial support of a number of sources in the United States, raising sufficient capital to build a 20-bed facility and to operate the program. Opened in late 1999, the hospice added a new and critical dimension of service to the poor and hungry in Haiti.

Like every other Franciscan missionary, Sister Althea was fulfilled by her ministry. But every once in a while she liked sitting by the sea and watching the waves crash on the rocks. There, as everywhere else, she saw God.

One very strong feature of her work in Haiti was to teach Haitian people to help Haitians. At the clinic at St. Helene, Haitians have been trained to operate the clinic themselves. In early 1997 the transition was made with the appointment of Marie Claire Louis as director of the clinic. This enabled Sister Althea to spend time finding donors to finance the building of a hospice for severely malnourished children in the area the clinic serves.

In addition, a young Haitian woman, Irlene Badeau, completed her initial formation in the novitiate in Paris and joined the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady.

Sister Althea died on September 9, 2003 from complications due to a severe attack of malaria. She was buried on the convent grounds in Haiti, where she could remain among the people she loved and served.

### **Mother Angel Verne (Sister Mary of the Angels)**

Mother Angel, as she was called, was a native of Calais, France. She enjoyed a distinguished career with the Franciscans in Louisiana, serving in each of the three hospitals in Louisiana during her 48 years of service to the people of Louisiana. She trained as a nurse at St. Francis' Nursing School in Monroe, and served in various capacities at Our Lady of the Lake in the School of Nursing and on the hospital staff. She was part of the original staff of Lourdes when it opened in 1949 and served as supervisor of purchasing. She succeeded Mother Marie Brendan Donegan as Administrator of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital.

During her career at Lourdes as Administrator, she led a \$1.415 million expansion of the hospital's capacity, increasing the capacity of the institution to 200 beds, adding beds principally in the obstetric and pediatric areas.

She died in 1967, and is buried in Roselawn Cemetery in Baton Rouge.

### **Sister Angelique Van Bockstale (Sister Angelica)**

Sister Angelique was one of the six founding Sisters who came with Mother de Bethanie

in 1911. The Diocese of Alexandria was their first stop since it was the Bishop of Alexandria who had extended the initial invitation. When the deal fell through with the local physicians, they moved on to Monroe where St. Francis Sanitarium was founded, and Mother de Bethanie and her five fellow Sisters gave their services to the people of northeast Louisiana.

A native of France, Sister Angelique worked in Constantinople for eight years teaching French to the native children before being missioned to Louisiana.

Sister Angelique was endowed with a beautiful voice and musical talent. She used those gifts generously as director of the choir in the Sisters' chapel, and by helping in St. Matthew's Parish choir on Sundays. She served as a vital link between the Motherhouse in France and the mission in northeast Louisiana. Sister served as sacristan for several years as well as seamstress in maintaining the Sisters' religious habits.

Sister Angelica passed away in 1967, having spent 56 years of her religious life in building up St. Francis and the mission in northeast Louisiana. She is buried in Monroe.

### **Sister Anita Dupre**

Sister Anita Dupre was one of a number of young women recruited into the sisterhood in the 70s. She entered the congregation as a postulant in 1972, after graduating from Terrebonne High School in Houma. She spent her first year in the novitiate in Baton Rouge, and after making her temporary vows, she was missioned to St. Francis in Monroe where she began a Licensed Practical Nurse course. In June of 1977 she graduated from Ouachita Vocational Technical Institute and transferred back to Baton Rouge, working at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital.

As part of her ministry she became heavily involved in the International Special Olympics held at LSU in 1983, serving as a volunteer nurse.

After serving at both St. Francis and Our Lady of the Lake, Sister Anita chose to leave the religious life.

### **Sister Ann Catherine Nguyen (Hoa Thi Nguyen)**

Sister Ann Catherine Nguyen (Hoa Thi Nguyen) is the first of another dimension to the international character of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, North American Province. The order had its genesis among the French, adding other dimensions with the Irish and Americans, and with the addition of Sister Ann Catherine, the first of three Vietnamese Sisters to join the order, an additional dimension was added.

Born and raised in the southern part of Viet Nam, Sister Ann Catherine grew up with a desire to become a Franciscan. At the age of 12 she wanted to join the Franciscans in her home country, but her parents would not allow it because of her young age. However, her yearning was so deep that soon after she was allowed to join. At age 20 she was working with a group of

disadvantaged children when the war began to explode around her. The year was 1975, and Sister Ann Catherine fled the convent and ran through the fighting to her family in Saigon. While thousands were escaping through the countryside, Sister Ann Catherine's family, 15 people in all including her grandmother, crossed a short gangplank to the shelter of the USS Enterprise, an aircraft carrier. Together with 30 people they huddled inside the gunwale, protected from the whizzing bullets around them. When the ship sailed without warning, they had no idea where they were going.

After several days and nights without food, they landed in the Philippines. From there they went on to Guam and then to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. After several months in a refugee camp, the Nguyen family was sponsored by the Archdiocese of New Orleans and settled there. Sister Ann Catherine joined the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, North American Province, and learned English while receiving her religious formation.

She wanted to be a nurse or social worker, but discovered she was too empathetic for either career. She soon found an occupation for her intellect while working in the business office at St. Francis Medical Center. She studied business at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, receiving a B.S. in Accounting, and worked at Our Lady of Lourdes before joining Our Lady of the Lake in the late 1980s.

As of this writing, Sister Ann Catherine handles important responsibilities in the Lake's accounting office. A very important avocation for her in this office is her relationship with the employees. They frequently seek her out to help them find insight in what they are doing, and she is well respected and loved for her gentle guidance. People also appreciate her playful nature. According to fellow Franciscan, Sister Kathleen Cain, "She likes to play tricks and is always up to shenanigans."

Sister Ann Catherine serves the hospital as well as her order in many different ways. Besides her accounting work, she is called upon to interpret for Vietnamese patients while bringing cheer to their hospital rooms. She has served as a junior directress for the Franciscans, working with young women who have taken their temporary vows and helping them to understand fully their ministry and their life as a religious before making their final commitment.

Sister has served on the Board of Directors of St. Francis Medical Center, Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center, and Our Lady of the Lake College.

### **Sister Anne Marie Twohig (Sr. Finbarr)**

At the age of 17, Sister Anne Marie left her native Ireland to enter the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Calais. In August 1938, encouraged and recruited for the religious life by Sister Patricia Hennessy (cousin of Mother Gertrude) she said good-bye to family and friends and set sail for Calais, France, accompanied by two other young girls and Sister Liguori Lawton, a veteran nurse from Midleton, County Cork, who was home on vacation from Louisiana. In Calais their education for the Franciscan life began under the direction of Mother Marguerite de la Croix.

The first weeks were uneventful except for the customary loneliness and the difficulty getting used to the French language and customs. Towards the middle of September, Sister Anne Marie learned that her father had died suddenly in Ireland, and two weeks later the Irish postulants were told that they had to return to Ireland due to the impending war.

In the beginning of October, the girls were notified that all was clear and that it was safe for them to return to Calais. This time, accompanied by Mother de Bethanie Crowley, they again set sail across the Irish Sea and then by train to London. Mother de Bethanie assisted them to the boat train to Dover and awaited the boat from France which would take her to the U.S.

In late December that same year, Sister Anne Marie received the news that her mother had died following an operation on her stomach. Sister Anne Marie accepted these losses and hardships as crosses the Lord was asking her to carry.

Sister Anne Marie became a novice and received the habit of the Franciscan Sisters on February 10, 1939. She was given the name Sister Marie Finbarr.

Sister continued her studies at Calais, but in September 1939 war broke out in France, and the young Sisters were transferred from Calais to Caffiers for safety precautions. The Superior General Mere Osmanne and the General Council accompanied them. It was a very hard time, food was rationed and the Nazis were rapidly invading the country. In February 1940 Sister Anne Marie was missioned to Cazin Hospital, Berck Plage. She assisted in the care of some forty male children, aged from three to twenty, who were suffering from tuberculosis of the bones.

On August 25, 1941, Sister pronounced her temporary vows at Fruges, Pas de Calais, where the novitiate was then located. It was later moved to a third location, St. Laurent in Drome, due to the war.

The hospital at Berck was occupied by the Germans; the Sisters had to move out, and Sister Anne Marie was assigned to the Clinic St. Francois in Paris. She remained there for three years, assisting with the medical and surgical patients. Many nights the Sisters left their beds and prayed in the chapel while the bombs resonated outside. She was in Paris on D Day. In 1945 she was transferred to Hautville Department of L'Aisne and in 1947 back to Berck Plage to care for female bedridden children.

In May 1949, Sister Anne Marie was notified that she was being assigned to Louisiana. After a few weeks in Ireland, she sailed the Atlantic with Sister Mary Brendan Donegan, Sister Angel and Sister Marie Gertrude Hennessy. They arrived in Monroe on July 4, 1949. After adjusting to the heat and culture, Sister Anne Marie was assigned to the business office, helping out as needed at the switchboard and admissions.

In 1952 Sister began classes at Northeast State University pursuing a degree in business, with a minor in accounting while working in the assigned areas. She graduated in 1955 and enrolled at St. Louis University to earn a Master's Degree in Hospital Administration, which she did after a year's residency at St. Mary's Hospital, Waterbury, Connecticut. Her thesis was

entitled "Coordinating Business Activities in a General Hospital." Upon returning to Monroe, she established an accounting system which served as the foundation for the hospital's business practices through the years.

In January 1960, Sister Anne Marie was appointed Administrator and Local Leader of the Monroe Community, replacing Mother Gertrude who had been appointed Regional Superior and Administrator of Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge. Sister held this position until September 1968 when she transferred to Baton Rouge to pursue nursing studies.

During her tenure as Administrator of St. Francis Hospital, Sister Anne Marie continued the direction begun by Mother Gertrude and completed a four million dollar, two story addition in front of the hospital along with new administrative offices, surgery suites, central supply, lobby, expansion of x-ray, dietary areas, business offices, medical records and others.

After graduating from Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing as R.N. in December 1970, Sr. Anne Marie worked as a staff nurse at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette and then as a member of the pastoral care team. In 1974 she transferred to Ollie Steele Burden Manor to minister to the residents. In 1976, she served as Director of Purchasing at Our Lady of the Lake until September 1979 when she was asked to return to St. Francis to serve as President/CEO until she retired in December 1992.

During Sr. Anne Marie's second tenure as Administrator, St. Francis showed significant growth under her leadership. Among the most notable accomplishments include a \$20 million dollar expansion project which added seven stories to the south end of the hospital, including additional medical/surgical beds, expanded surgical suites, new laboratory and emergency services, rehabilitation services, two open heart surgical units and a cardio-vascular recovery unit, a new NICU and PICU, expanded obstetrical services as well as the ground work for the 1000 car garage.

Upon the occasion of her retirement, Sister Anne Marie made the following comment, "The Lord has blessed me with the opportunity to serve His children both as a nurse and as an administrator . . . I have learned that happiness in life comes in helping others, that nothing in life is impossible when people work together in a constructive way, and that the Lord does provide if we respond to His gifts and resources prudently and with devotion. Over the years I have had the joy of knowing and working with many dedicated people who gave so much of their lives to helping others."

Dr. Dan Dupree, who served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of St. Francis during part of the time Sister Anne Marie led the hospital, had this to say about her, "There is no question from a historical perspective that Sister Anne Marie has been more responsible for the development of health care services in our region than anyone else . . . Few people are able to manage, let alone lead, an industry so diversified and changing as health care. Yet, Sister Anne Marie has done so continually for many years. There is a personal sadness concerning her retirement, but there is pride in the foundation and standards she has left to guide everyone interested in quality caring."

Sister Anne Marie is remembered as a competent and compassionate administrator. She always did what was best for the patient. She stood by her employees through difficult financial times. In an era when 50 percent of the hospitals in the country lost money, when most area hospitals had to lay off employees from time to time, Sister Anne Marie made every payroll, kept the hospital financially secure, and made sure that the quality of care remained constant.

In addition to her service at St. Francis, Sister Anne Marie served three terms on the Board of Directors of Our Lady of the Lake Hospital and one term on the Board of Ollie Steele Burden Manor.

In 1991, Sister Anne Marie was named a Distinguished Alumnus from St. Louis University for her leadership and work in health care. She celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 1988 and her sixty years as a Franciscan Sister in 1998.

### **Sister Barbara Arceneaux (Sister Mary Benedict)**

One of the four natives of Southwest Louisiana currently serving in the Order, Sister Barbara Arceneaux, has had a distinguished career. She served as Assistant to the Superior General and as a member of the General Council of the Franciscan Missionaries, world-wide, operating in the headquarters in Paris, from 1982 to 1994. She currently serves as Assistant Administrator of Ollie Steele Burden Manor Nursing Home, a subsidiary of Our Lady of the Lake Hospital.

Sister Barbara received a Bachelor of Science Degree in nursing from Northeast Louisiana University in Monroe and a Masters of Science Degree in Administration from Notre Dame du Lac University in South Bend, Indiana.

She has served in two of the hospitals of the Franciscan Missionaries in Louisiana. She was a nurse's aide at Ollie Steele Burden Manor and at St. Francis while working toward the Bachelor of Nursing Degree at Northeast Louisiana University. She served as a nurse at both St. Francis and Lourdes and in the Pastoral Care Ministry at Our Lady of Lourdes and as Vice President for Human Resources at Our Lady of Lourdes in Lafayette.

She currently is serving her second term as a member of the Provincial Council of the North American Province. She also has served on the Board of Directors of Ollie Steele Burden Manor and is presently serving on the Boards of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital and Our Lady of the Lake.

### **Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley**

Mother de Bethanie, as she was generally called, was a giant in the development of health care in Louisiana. She was the founder of two of Louisiana's leading hospitals, St. Francis in Monroe and Our Lady of the Lake in Baton Rouge. St. Francis, the first institution she founded, is the largest medical center in Northeast Louisiana, and Our Lady of the Lake is the largest privately owned medical center in the State of Louisiana. Both are on the leading edge in the use of medical technology, and have as their value system, the provision of medical care to all who

need it regardless of race, creed, or ability to pay. In the tradition of St. Francis, they focus on providing health care to God's people.

Mother de Bethanie came to Louisiana in 1911, accompanied by five other Franciscan Sisters to form a Catholic hospital in the Alexandria area. When that plan fell through, she and her group went to Monroe at the invitation of the Catholic pastor in Monroe, Father Enaut. With support from Father Enaut and leaders in the Monroe community, St. Francis Sanitarium was opened in 1913. In the interim while the Sanitarium was under construction, Mother and her group of Sisters administered to the sick in their homes and in area medical facilities.

Mother de Bethanie, born Mary Catherine Crowley of Inchafune, County Cork, Ireland, went to France as a teacher in 1891. After eight years of teaching, she accepted a call to the religious life and was received into the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in 1899. After completing her religious education, she was assigned to study nursing. When her course was completed, she directed a school for the handicapped and hearing impaired children. She later worked in a hospital in Versailles, acting as administrator during her tenure.

In her work in developing St. Francis Sanitarium in Monroe, Mother de Bethanie and her group of Sisters were strongly committed to providing the best of care to any and all sick people, regardless of race, religion, or ability to pay. In the Sanitarium, there were two special wards, one for African Americans, and one for indigent people.

Mother de Bethanie also opened a nursing school for Northeast Louisiana. The modern day successor is the School of Nursing at Northeast Louisiana State University.

In 1915, Mother de Bethanie was one of the charter members of what was then known as the Association of American Hospitals, the forerunner of the Catholic Hospital Association in America. In 1918, the Spanish flu epidemic hit the U.S., killing many people in Northeast Louisiana. The untiring service of Mother de Bethanie and the Sisters served to endear the Sisters to the largely Protestant area that St. Francis served.

Immediately after the Armistice in 1918, Mother de Bethanie began a series of trips to Europe to recruit more Sisters. The needs were growing, and two trips netted 14 additional Sisters. This laid the foundation for the next development that occurred, the demand for service from other communities.

In 1922, at the request of Father Gassler, Pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Baton Rouge, Mother de Bethanie agreed to open a sanitarium in Baton Rouge. Satisfied that St. Francis was doing well, she felt that it was a propitious time to respond to the needs of the Baton Rouge community. She selected a site on University Lake (now called Capitol Lake), just north of the old Louisiana State University campus, hence the name, Our Lady of the Lake Sanitarium. She took with her a cadre of Sisters from Monroe to open the facility in Baton Rouge. Both institutions continued to flourish under her leadership.

Leaving a legacy of two excellent medical institutions in Louisiana, Mother de Bethanie returned to her native Ireland to open a training program for young Sisters and to open a nursing

home. In 1947 at the age of 74, Mother went to her eternal reward.

In death and in life, this pioneering woman left behind a legacy of love and service, epitomizing the values of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. She was indeed a visionary, as well as an outstanding organizer. Her untiring commitment to service in honor of Almighty God serves as a living legacy of the work of the Franciscan Missionaries in Louisiana.

### **Sister Betty Lyons**

Sister Betty Lyons, a native of Ireland, has had an exemplary career as a Franciscan Sister in Louisiana. A most dedicated and forthright person, she has served in a number of positions. Currently, she serves in the administration of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette, giving special attention to mission effectiveness and community service.

She has been influential in the leadership of the North American Province, currently serving her second term on the Provincial Council. She has served a three-year term on the Board of Directors of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, and has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the FMOL Health System since 1995.

Earlier in her career, Sister Betty worked first in dietetics at Our Lady of the Lake and later as Special Services Director. She also worked in religious formation as part of the novitiate training program. While serving in Lafayette, she did social work for the Diocese of Lafayette.

### **Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne**

As the first elected Provincial of the North American Province of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, Sister Brendan Mary has played a major role in the maturation of the Health System as a health provider organization. In this elected capacity she has served four terms as Provincial, two four-year terms, followed by a break of eight years, then two more terms, consistent with the policies of the world wide order. In particular, she has provided leadership to the North American Province during the crucial years of much change in the health care system in the United States. Her careful attention to detail and her patient demeanor in the face of crisis have been hallmarks of her leadership. She has kept the Health System pointed in the right direction as the three medical centers have faced challenges in their markets and gone through the process of moving to an integrated health system concept. This has presented many challenges to her leadership, and she has met the challenge with insight and determination.

Sister Brendan has served as a member of the Governing Boards of both St. Francis and Our Lady of the Lake hospitals. She served on the Board at St. Francis in the early 70s and at the Lady of the Lake from the mid 70s to the mid 80s, helping to implement the change to a joint governance partnership with representatives of the geographic areas being served by the hospitals.

Sister Brendan grew up in County Cork, Ireland surrounded by the green fields, tall mountains and sandy beaches. Even as a child, she was attuned to nature, exhibiting a peace of mind in tune with the environment in which she lived. As a Franciscan, she has continued to

reflect peace and certitude through her kindness and gentleness as she works in the highly charged atmosphere of a continuously changing health care industry.

One of her distinguishing characteristics is her gift for listening. While studying for the B.S.N. Degree at Spaulding University in Louisville, Kentucky, she worked as a dorm nurse and befriended students in the difficult days of the 60s. Upon her return to Baton Rouge, she counseled young women considering a religious vocation with the Franciscans.

Later, she completed a Master's Degree at the University of Notre Dame. Afterward, she put her skills and talents to work as Director of Our Lady of the Lake's Immunological Support Program, a Baton Rouge residence for AIDS victims.

Sister Brendan Mary always knew that she would serve God. When she was 20, a recruiting Sister knocked on her door. She promptly packed her bags and entered the novitiate in England. As always, she found beauty at every turn. In Scotland, where she completed her religious training, it was in the heather-covered mountains and the melodious sounds of bagpipes. In Louisiana, where she became a nurse, it was in the miracle of healing.

### **Sister Brigida Comerford**

A native of Ireland, Sister Brigida Comerford was one of the original group of six Franciscan Sisters who came to Louisiana in 1911 to open a hospital. In 1919 she accompanied Mother de Bethanie to France and remained there. She was the biological sister of Sister St. Patrick Comerford.

### **Sister Camilla Johnson**

Sister Mary Camilla Johnson served at St. Francis in Monroe in the 1960s. She was a graduate of the School of Nursing at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital. Nothing further is known about her service as a Franciscan Sister.

### **Sister Catherine Frances Martin**

Sister Catherine Frances Martin completed the Novitiate in Baton Rouge. She served for a period of time at Our Lady of the Lake in Baton Rouge. She left the order after a short period of service.

### **Sister Mary Cabrini Dry (Sr. Lilly Dry)**

Sister Cabrini joined the Franciscans in the 1950s. Like many, she was much interested in the social apostolate, as contrasted with the earlier emphasis on health care. She earned her R.N. from McNeese University and worked at Our Lady of Lourdes before serving as Director of Nursing Services at St. Francis Hospital in Monroe. She also served as Vocation Directress for many years.

### **Sister Marie Claire Revelard**

Sister Marie Claire is a native of France. A veteran missionary, she has served in a number of mission countries as a Franciscan. Since 1996, she has served in the Haiti mission sponsored by the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, North American Province. Together with Sister Althea Jonis, she ministers to the people in the Aquin, Haiti area.

### **Sister Colman Coughlin**

A native of Ireland, Sister St. Colman Coughlin arrived in Monroe in 1921. She came to Louisiana in a contingent of eight Sisters in order to relieve Sisters at St. Francis who were to be transferred to Our Lady of the Lake for opening of service to the people of Baton Rouge. She became seriously ill and died shortly thereafter. She was very resigned to her death. She died on February 25, 1923, and she is buried in Monroe in the Catholic cemetery.

### **Sister Deborah Guidry**

Sister Deborah Guidry completed the Novitiate in Baton Rouge. She served at St. Francis in Monroe. She left the order after a short period of service as a Franciscan Sister.

### **Sister Earleen Desselle (Sister Mary Peter)**

A native of Reserve, Louisiana, Sister Earleen came from a very religious background. Her mother was a Carmelite Sister for a time, leaving after an illness. She began her career as an aide at Our Lady of the Lake. She moved into the Pastoral Care area when it became prominent as a career. She held the C.P.E., a certificate in Clinical Pastoral Education, a required certification by the National Association of Catholic Chaplains.

During her career, Sister Earleen worked in all three of the Franciscan hospitals, also including work in regional settings, such as Church Point and St. Martinville. She worked with elderly patients in St. Brendan's Hospital, an affiliate organization of Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of the Lake, and in the Lake's low-income elderly housing facility located on Bishop Ott Drive. Sr. Earleen also ministered in the Pastoral Care department at the Lake.

Sister Earleen died on September 14, 2003 following a courageous battle with leukemia.

### **Sister Mary Edana Corcoran**

One of the most well known and beloved Franciscan Sisters in Baton Rouge, Sister Edana has epitomized sisterhood to the people of the Baton Rouge area. As patient representative for many years, her kindly smile and gentle demeanor endeared her to thousands of people as they became patients or as family and friends of patients. Either in the lobby or in the halls, she was the visible presence of the Franciscan Sisters in Our Lady of the Lake Medical Center.

Prior to serving in that role, she served as a floor nurse and floor supervisor after arriving

at the Lake in 1937. When she retired several years ago, she ended 62 years of continuous service to the people of this area. As she said, "It's important to spend time with patients, just to listen to their joys, sorrows, anger, and frustrations . . . You just let people know that you are there and you share everything you have with them. You show them the mercy of God and if you listen and they know you care, it helps a lot."

A registered nurse and graduate of Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing, she served for some years as Assistant Administrator of the hospital. She served on the Board of Directors of Our Lady of the Lake for 13 years. While on the Board, she also served as Treasurer.

Now retired, Sister Edana resides at Maryville Convent. She and her biological sister, Sister Eileen Corcoran, who is presently serving at St. Francis in Monroe and who is semi-retired, are natives of Ireland. Born in County Cork, Ireland, Sister Edana entered the Franciscan Order in 1931, taking her first vows in 1934 and her final vows in 1937. She became a United States citizen in 1943. Sister Edana also holds degrees in nursing from Our Lady of the Lake and LSU nursing schools.

#### **Sister Mary Edana Collins (Hannah Collins)**

A native of Ireland, she came to the United States in 1925. She was assigned to St. Francis in Monroe, serving as Assistant Administrator of St. Francis. She died at the very young age of 29 in 1931. She is buried in Monroe in the Catholic cemetery.

#### **Sister Edith Donegan (Brigid Donegan)**

Sister Edith served 58 years as a Franciscan Sister, 55 of those at St. Francis in Monroe, after her novitiate in France. Born in Cork County, Ireland in 1904, she died on May 22, 1985 and was laid to rest in Monroe, the community in which she had served the Lord for 55 years. She celebrated her golden anniversary as a Sister in 1978.

A joyous, happy person, with a happy-go-lucky temperament and a fine sense of humor, she earned a nursing diploma at St. Francis in 1934. Her first assignment, one she held for ten years, was Night Supervisor on the 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift, seven days a week. She later spent almost five years as Surgical Supervisor, and five years as Pediatric Supervisor. In her later years, she served on the Pastoral Care team, and called herself "the roving Catholic Sister."

She followed an older sister, Marie Brendan Donegan, into the Franciscan Order. A relatively late entry into the sisterhood at the age of 23, she left a "broken-hearted" father who saw his youngest daughter leave for the sisterhood.

#### **Sister Mary Enda Walsh**

A native of Ireland, Sister Mary Enda died an untimely death in 1967 in an accident in the swimming pool at Maryville Convent. She was a student at Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing.

## **Sister Eileen Corcoran**

Sister Eileen Corcoran was born in a small country townland named Droumdeega in picturesque West Cork, Ireland. She was one of six children born to Patrick and Margaret O'Brien Corcoran. All attended the local national school. One day, while the children were recessing under the shade of a huge oak tree, a pony and trap with two occupants approached the entrance gate. Sister Eileen recalls this event: "Today, more than sixty years later, I can vividly see Mother de Bethanie Crowley accompanied by her niece Joan Hennigan, chauffeur in the front seat of the vehicle."

Sister Eileen was very impressed with Mother de Bethanie who was seeking to foster vocations in young women and recruit candidates for the Franciscan Sisters of Calais. Mother de Bethanie recounted the life of St. Francis of Assisi, who endured so many hardships for the sake of Christ. In reflecting on it later, Sister Eileen felt that God may indeed be calling her to this way of life and that the initial seed of her vocation was planted. Her sister, Sister Edana, had entered the Franciscan Order earlier and appeared extremely happy and fulfilled in her vocation.

When Sister Eileen shared her experience with her mother, Mrs. Corcoran advised the young student to seek further spiritual guidance. After additional correspondence with Mother de Bethanie and a week-long retreat in her parish, she was convinced of her vocation and made preparations to leave family and home in West Cork.

Two weeks prior to her departure for Calais, Sister Eileen went to Honan Home, the recruitment center, and on November 1, 1934, accompanied by Mother de Bethanie and another young aspirant, they set sail for Calais, France. As with any young country girl, she experienced loneliness for some time. Becoming accustomed to a new language and culture was not easy. Sister Jerome Crowley, who was in the novitiate at the time and awaiting her departure for the Aden (Yemen) missions, was extremely helpful. She had conquered the basics of the French language and made conversational French much easier for Sister Eileen.

At the end of the two year novitiate period, Sister Eileen was assigned to Cazin, Berck Plage, Calais, to help care for handicapped children. She enjoyed interacting with the children, aged three to twenty, and stated that the experience gave her confidence in expressing herself in the language.

After ten months she returned to the novitiate in Calais to prepare for Temporary Profession which she made in May 1937, along with ten other Sisters. Sister Edana, who was stationed in Bethune, came to the Motherhouse for the occasion. It was an extremely happy reunion. Shortly afterwards, Sister Eileen was notified that she would be leaving France in the fall and missioned to St. Francis Sanitarium, Monroe, Louisiana.

October 21, 1937 remains one of the highlights in Sister Eileen Corcoran's religious career. On that memorable date, eight Franciscan Sisters set sail from LeHavre, France, on board the S.S. Champlain, a French liner, en route to New York. Four members of the group – Sister Gertrude Hennessy, Mother Mary Brendan Donegan, Mother Henrietta, and Sister Francis (Ann Young) – were all seasoned travelers returning to Louisiana following a vacation with their

families in Ireland. The other four Sisters – Sister Marie Edana, Sister St. John Baptist, Sister Mary Michael Twohig and Sister Eileen – had only read or heard about this far away country from friends or family members. Excited, they awaited the opportunity to set foot on American soil. Towards the end of the fifth day, they were scanning the horizon hoping to get a view of the New York skyline and the Statue of Liberty.

Following a two-day and two-night train journey, the Sisters were joyfully anticipating arrival in Monroe early on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. They were met at the station, received a hearty welcome and a delicious breakfast, and were introduced to nineteen Sisters – eighteen from Ireland and one unforgettable French Sister, Sister Marie Angelique, one of the pioneers.

Awaiting admission to the nursing school, Sister Eileen was assigned to help at the switchboard. In 1938 she enrolled in the three-year diploma nursing program, graduating in 1941. On May 24, 1940, Sister Eileen and Sister Mary Michael pronounced their final vows in a simple ceremony in the little chapel on the third floor in the sanitarium. Mother Henrietta and Sister Edana traveled from Baton Rouge for the occasion.

Some years later, Sister attended Northwestern State College, Natchitoches, received a B.S. in Nursing, and graduated Cum Laude. She was actively engaged in professional nursing from 1941 to 1981.

Following graduation, she worked under the supervision of Sister Liguori and was assigned the position of night supervisor, a position she held for seven years. In preparation for night duty, she took a crash course in hematology and radiology so as to eliminate “on call” personnel. Job descriptions were not even thought of in those days. Nursing Supervisors did everything that they deemed necessary for patient comfort and physician satisfaction. In reflecting on her years as night supervisor, Sister Eileen commented, “Judging by current standards and advanced technology, the decade of the forties could well be classified as the Dark Ages of Medicine.”

Following night duty, Sister Eileen was assigned to Reginald Hall, a separate building for black patients prior to desegregation, which was a meaningful and enriching experience.

One of the high points of her career as a nurse was her involvement in establishing a four-bed cardiac care, nursing unit with the physicians in 1967, in which she served as head nurse for seven years. In anticipation of the opening of the C.C.U., Sister took a course in cardiac care nursing at St. Luke's Hospital in Memphis. In reflecting on this experience, she commented, “Cardiac care is an area where a nurse is frequently called on to react instantly, decisively and professionally. It is also an area where she develops a close relationship with patients and families in critical life situations.”

In 1981, as Sister Eileen was gradually winding down her nursing career, the administration implemented a patient’s representative program as part of a continuing effort to improve the quality of patient satisfaction. Sister was called upon to lead the program and served as a liaison between the patient and administration until the program was fully organized.

Being involved in health care for many years, Sister Eileen learned that some hobbies are essential in maintaining physical and spiritual wellbeing. She thoroughly enjoyed nature walks, reading and music as well as being a lover of pets, as was St. Francis of Assisi. Abandoned kittens were often fortunate to be rescued by Sister Eileen and given a good home.

In 1984, following a three-week spiritual renewal program at the Catholic Reflection Center in Maggie Valley, North Carolina, Sister celebrated her Golden Jubilee at Maryville, Baton Rouge. In 1994, she celebrated her sixty years of religious life and in 1999 her sixty-five years in the Order. On this occasion, Sister Eileen made the following comment: "In retrospect, I look at the past sixty-five years with a sense of gratitude to God and my community, and in faith I will accept with courage what lies ahead."

In addition to her nursing career, Sister was also very active in leadership and management activities. She was a leader in the Franciscan community in Monroe, serving a term as Community Leader among the Franciscans there. She was also very active in corporate management activities. She was one of the Sisters who presided at the transition to a corporate structure in the 50s and 60s, serving on the Board of Directors, including service as Vice President. She was also active in nursing activities in Louisiana, serving a term on the Board of Directors of the Louisiana State Nursing Association.

A biological sister of Sister Edana Corcoran, who served much of her career at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge, Sister Eileen characterized her career with this statement: "Through the years, nursing has given me a deep sense of satisfaction . . . Knowing that I have been instrumental in helping people back to health and instilling a sense of acceptance and resignation in those who do not recover has been a challenging and rewarding experience."

Her closing quotation is taken from Psalm 118: "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His mercy and love endures forever."

### **Sister Eileen Rowe**

A native of Ireland and an unassuming person by nature, Sister Eileen has served as a Franciscan Sister in Louisiana since 1971. Her early years were spent at Our Lady of the Lake, and her later years have been at Our Lady of Lourdes in Lafayette.

A gentle person of quiet demeanor, Sister Eileen glories in her service to others. Her current assignment is patient representative where she spends her time at Our Lady of Lourdes tending to the needs of patients and their families.

### **Mother Gertrude Hennessy**

Mother Gertrude Hennessy personified the Franciscan mission in many aspects of her life as a nurse, hospital administrator, and spiritual leader. Her foresight and ability to anticipate community needs for expanded health care facilities thrust her into leadership roles in the development of two major Louisiana medical centers, Our Lady of the Lake in Baton Rouge, and St. Francis in Monroe.

The path of Mother Gertrude from her native home, County Cork, Ireland, began in 1925 when she left to enter the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady at the Motherhouse in Calais, France. Three years later, she came to the United States. In 1931, she graduated from Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing. She earned a B.S. Degree in nursing from LSU School of Nursing in 1936.

She came up through the ranks, serving as operating room supervisor at the Lake for 20 years. In 1949, she was named Hospital Administrator and Religious Superior at St. Francis. She led St. Francis into a period of planning and expansion that resulted in a new hospital building, a new chapel, and other medical facilities to meet the increasing needs and health care requirements in Monroe.

In 1960 Mother Gertrude was named Regional Superior of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in Louisiana. When she left St. Francis in January, 1960, to assume her new responsibilities, she was awarded a plaque, expressing the heartfelt gratitude of the city of Monroe for her "meritorious and outstanding leadership" in serving the health needs of the community.

Back in Baton Rouge at the Lake, Mother Gertrude served as Administrator until 1967, when she was succeeded by the late J. B. Heroman, Jr. the first lay leader of a Franciscan institution in Louisiana.

In the words of Sister Anne Marie Twohig, Mother Gertrude was a talented woman, and few people were aware of "her special attributes as a woman of faith, of love, of prayer, her generosity to the poor and lowly, and her humble service to others as she daily lived the Gospel." Sister Anne Marie further characterized her as follows: "Mother Gertrude understood that true greatness is in serving others and being aware of God's presence in their lives. She lived her faith as a Franciscan Sister with equanimity, compassion, a sense of duty and high standards of service. She put her service to the community and others ahead of her own preferences, even if it entailed great sacrifice."

In 1975, she celebrated her 50th Jubilee as a Franciscan Missionary of Our Lady. She died at 88 years of age on March 8, 1996.

### **Sister Helen Cahill**

In 1959, Sister Pauline O' Sullivan was recruiting for the Franciscans in Ireland. Sister Helen Cahill was inspired by her and made her commitment to join the Order. A native of County Cork, she went through the novitiate in England, and came to the United States in 1962 after taking her first vows. Assigned to St. Francis, she went through Nursing School. The Sisters in Monroe made a distinct impression on her. She came away from that experience believing that every day is a ministry, making one more aware of the presence of God and the work he has laid out for each of us.

Her first assignment at St. Francis was as a licensed practical nurse (LPN). She served

for 10 years in oncology, mainly the 3-11 p.m. shift. She later moved to the Lake, earning the title of Registered Nurse. She did additional study, earning a Master's Degree in Pastoral Studies from Loyola University, followed later by work in Religious Formation at St. Louis University. In Baton Rouge, Sister Helen worked at the Lake, serving in Pastoral Ministry. In recent years, she has served as Director of Novices, while continuing her ministry in Pastoral Care.

Sister Helen has been active in the administration and leadership of the Order. She has served on the Provincial Council and on the Board of Directors of St. Francis as well as the Board of Trustees of the FMOL Health System.

In 1984, she celebrated her 25th Jubilee as a Franciscan. She commented as follows: "These years . . . have been challenging and fruitful for me . . . I have met many wonderful people and experienced life in a way that has been very meaningful. I have had the opportunity of using my talents and sharing with others who, in turn, have touched my life and helped me grow."

### **Mother Henrietta Didesse**

Mother Henrietta, a native of France, was a major force in the development of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady health ministry in Louisiana. She was the second Administrator of Our Lady of the Lake Hospital, replacing Mother de Bethanie in 1929. She stepped down in 1960, and moved to Lafayette, serving as Administrator of Our Lady of Lourdes until 1967. She was also the first President of the non-profit corporation at St. Francis. Thus she had forty years of service in guiding the three hospitals in the Health System during periods of major growth and expansion. Without question she was a person endowed with a keen intellect and the uncommon ability to organize and manage complex health care centers. She served as Superior of the Sisters at Our Lady of the Lake and at Our Lady of Lourdes.

Mother Henrietta was born in 1890 in France. She was one of the early Sisters, coming to the United States in 1921 to study nursing at St. Francis Hospital. She worked at St. Francis as well, took special training in anesthesia at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and rose to the position of Supervisor of the operating room.

Mother Henrietta presided over a period of major growth at Our Lady of the Lake. Under her leadership, a novitiate to train Sisters was opened, as well as a nursing school. Additionally, she led two major expansions of Our Lady of the Lake, as well as the change in name from sanitarium to hospital. She also built a convent to house the Sisters serving in Baton Rouge.

In 1956, Our Lady of the Lake was formerly chartered as a non-profit corporation, and Mother Henrietta served as its first President, in addition to her function as Administrator. It was during these times that she began to get lay leadership in the Baton Rouge area involved in the growth and development of Our Lady of the Lake, laying the groundwork for the eventual involvement of community leadership in the development and management of the hospital.

Mother Henrietta died in 1981 and is buried in Roselawn Cemetery in Baton Rouge.

### **Sister M. Hortulane Arnould**

Sister Hortulane, came to the United States in 1911 as part of the first contingent of Franciscan Sisters to come to Louisiana.

### **Sister Jean Marie Renaux**

Sister Jean Marie Renaux was a native of Algeria, born of French parents. After serving as a missionary in Ethiopia for nine years, she came to the United States in 1937 to serve at Our Lady of the Lake. She served in Baton Rouge and then went to Our Lady of Lourdes for 10 years. In her later years, Sister Jean Marie maintained the chapel sacristy at the Lake. She loved music and sang like a canary, according to the Sisters who served with her. Sister Jean Marie died in 1982 and is buried at Roselawn Cemetery in Baton Rouge.

### **Sister Jerome Crowley**

Sister Jerome, characterized as a person with a heart open to everyone, had a highly varied career as a Franciscan Sister. She served not only at St. Francis in Monroe, but she also served for six years as General Councilor to the General Superior in Paris. A native of County Cork, Ireland, she served over a period of sixteen years in many foreign missions, including Aden and Ethiopia. She spoke English and French fluently, and also was conversant in Arabic, Italian, Ethiopian and Gaelic.

Sister Jerome was proud of the fact that she and Mother de Bethanie were cousins, relating back to the Crowley clan in Ireland. She was characterized as someone who was very special to those who knew her. She was both strong and gentle, setting people at ease with a warm smile, a motherly nod, and with eyes full of wisdom and kindness. She was described as knowing no strangers.

Sister Jerome arrived at St Francis in 1951. She graduated from Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing in 1955, and completed her nursing studies at Northwestern State University with a B.S. in Nursing. During her early years at St. Francis, she served as Operating Room Supervisor.

In her later years after her service as General Councilor in Paris, she served as a Visiting Sister and Patient Representative in the Pastoral Care Department at St. Francis. Sister Jerome served on the St. Francis Board of Directors from 1964 to 1972, serving as Treasurer in her early years on the Board.

### **Sister St. Joseph Martin**

Sister St. Joseph was one of the six Franciscan Sisters who came to Louisiana in 1911 to open a hospital in Monroe. In her later years as a Sister, she served at Our Lady of the Lake in Baton Rouge. She died in 1946, having given herself to God through 55 years of service to the people of Louisiana.

## **Sister Margaret Gaffney**

Sister Margaret Gaffney was one of the six founding Sisters who came to Monroe in 1911 to found St. Francis Sanitarium. She served at St. Francis until 1921 when she returned to France.

## **Sister Julie O'Donovan (Sister Philomena)**

Sister Julie O'Donovan symbolized the Franciscan commitment to the sick. She spent 51 years of her life at Our Lady of the Lake caring for sick children. In her later years, she spent time with the residents at Ollie Steele Burden Manor.

From County Cork, Ireland, the gentle Julie O'Donovan made her commitment to religious life at age 13. Perhaps she was guided to her calling by her guardian angel, for that is what Sister Julie became at Our Lady of the Lake: a "guardian angel" who cared for sick children.

Sister Julie left the family farm at age 16, studied at the Franciscan Motherhouse in France for three years, and arrived in America in 1935. She entered the St. Francis Nursing School in Monroe and, after graduation in 1939, immediately took up supervisory duties on the second floor of Our Lady of the Lake. It soon became the pediatric floor.

In those days, there was one nurse and one aide for 10 patients, but Sister Julie organized the floor so well that there was still time to spend with the little ones. At the time, technology was pretty basic, but the children were saved using techniques like croup tents, prayer and love.

The nurses remember how fast everyone sprang to work when they heard Sister Julie's 7 a.m. approach, signaled by the rustling of her starched habit and the clicking of her rosary beads. Her philosophy was "there was something to do if you just looked for it." Sister Julie operated by the philosophy that as supervisor she had to do more than her share. She would return to the floor in the middle of the night to check on children who were very sick. For hours at a time she would rock premature babies who would cry for their mothers who had already been sent home. On holidays, she worked 16-hour shifts so the nurses could take time off to be with their families.

The years brought challenge and change. In the early days, when there was no recovery room, the nurses kept a close vigil with children who had surgery. Each year, summer and winter brought an outbreak of stomach flu, and fluid injections were used to keep the little ones alive. During the 1950s, hot packs and, again love and prayer, saved children who had polio.

Sister Julie became attached to many of the children, especially the five or six babies always in the nursery awaiting adoption. Those who came back to visit as they grew older were special to her.

The five decades from 1939 to 1990 brought Sister Julie both sadness and joy. She still grieved for the children who were lost and wondered whether she could have done more. There

were also times of happiness and healing, such as the contributions of nickels and pennies to the “kitty” Sister Julie started for the hospital's first playroom, where Pike Burden made the children laugh with his magic shows and installed a playroom sign reading "No Doctors Allowed."

Sister Julie relinquished her job as Supervisor in 1984, but continued to work on the floor until 1990. She celebrated her 60th Jubilee in 1992. She cared for the chapel sacristy at Maryville Convent as long as she was able, and continued her “ministry of prayer” until her death on August 16, 2000.

### **Sister Juliette de Castro Barros**

Sister Juliette began her service at St. Francis in 1919. After four years she moved to the Lake, serving there until she died in 1986, after 63 years of service to the people of Louisiana. Her ministry focused on the laundry, the serving room, and the chapel. She also did tatting, making many mats and rugs in her lifetime for use at the hospital and in the convent.

### **Sister June Ann Meyer**

Sister June Ann Meyer entered the religious life as a Franciscan in 1977, following several years of teaching elementary school in a Catholic institution in Toledo, Ohio. She went to St. Francis in 1979 where she taught at Little Flower Academy. When she was not teaching, she worked in Social Services and Pastoral Care.

In 1982, she left Monroe and went to Ethiopia to serve in the Franciscan mission there. She taught school in that troubled land which was in the middle of civil war, and inevitably became involved in famine relief. She characterized the situation as “extreme hardship.” She remembered one day when the Sisters could not buy bread. Little children were dying of starvation every day. Sister June felt those times were very difficult, but “they made you want to go back and help.”

Returning to Baton Rouge, Sister June worked at the St. Paul Center in the northern area of the city. She also pursued further education in social work. After completing that program she went back to Monroe to work in Social Services at St. Francis. Subsequent to that, Sister June served in the Franciscan mission in Aquin, Haiti, where she worked in conjunction with Sister Althea Jonis and Sr. Marie Claire. Since returning from Haiti, she has joined the staff of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, working in the Catholic Community Services Program.

### **Sister Kathleen Cain**

Sister Kathleen, like many of her contemporaries, joined the Franciscans in 1968 right after finishing high school. Enjoying an outstanding career as a Franciscan, she has focused on the administrative side of health care, making strong contributions in the innovation of new approaches to medical care, such as St. Francis House and the Center for Aging Resources, the Industrial Medical Center, and low-income elderly housing programs, including Villa St. Francis, Calais House and Assisi Village.

A trained and practicing corporate lawyer, she served a term as vice president for legal affairs at Our Lady of the Lake. She came to that position by going to night school while working full time. She earned three business degrees from LSU and a law degree from Loyola University in New Orleans.

A native of Texas and the daughter of an attorney, she enjoys the challenges of working in the complex world of law and management. She has played an influential role in the management of the FMOL Health System, serving on the Provincial Council of the North American Province, the Board of Directors of Our Lady of the Lake Medical Center, the Lake's Finance Committee, and the FMOL Health System Board of Trustees. As a corporate attorney, she made a major contribution in the settlement of the steel corrosion problem in the structure of Our Lady of the Lake Hospital. Her most recent project has been the formation of a Legal Services Center for Health System employees.

### **Sister Kathleen McDonough**

A native of Cincinnati, Ohio, Sister Kathleen Ann was one of the many American women who joined the Franciscans in the late 60s and later left the Order. She was an influential member of the congregation, serving a term on the Provincial Council and on the Board of Directors of Our Lady of the Lake. She left the Order in the 80s.

In addition to her service at Our Lady of the Lake and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospitals, she also taught first grade at Holy Family Parochial School in Lafayette. Receiving a Master's in Religious Education, she also served as Director of Religious Education for St. Genevieve Catholic Church in Lafayette.

### **Sister Kim Le Nguyen**

A native of Viet Nam, Sister Kim first felt the call to the religious life while fleeing from the Viet Cong takeover in South Viet Nam. She and her family were on the South China Sea heading to Malaysia when they were caught in a rough thunderstorm. Her Father fell overboard and was lost at sea. She was thirteen at the time, and this difficult and hazardous experience caused her to think seriously about her future. Upon emigration to the United States, she looked at several different religious groups, but they were too structured for her interests in art and the healing process, especially for children. She learned about the Franciscans through a contact with Sister Vernola Lyons at a meeting in California, and followed up by joining the Order.

Sister Kim prepared herself for her chosen vocation by getting a broad-based education. She earned the Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from L.S.U. and a Master's Degree in Art Therapy from Mount Mary College in Wisconsin.

Sister Kim's work for the Franciscans has focused on two areas. Earlier in her ministry, she served as Vocations Director for the Order, working with individuals who were interested in the religious life and institutions who fostered religious vocations. Since her return from graduate work, she has worked in the children's center at Our Lady of the Lake, focusing on the use of art in the healing process.

## **Sister Laura Garin**

A native of California, Sister Laura Garin entered the Franciscan novitiate in 1967. She was a clinical nurse specialist, receiving her R.N. and B.S. Degrees from Northeast Louisiana State University and a Master's Degree from California State University. As a Franciscan, she served at Our Lady of Lourdes. As part of her ministry, she served a term as Local Superior of the Franciscan Community in Lafayette. She also served a term on the Board of Directors of Our Lady of the Lake. Sr. Laura was later released from her vows.

## **Sister Liguori Lawton**

Sister Liguori Lawton was one of the more beloved Sisters who spent her entire career at St. Francis as a nurse caring for the sick. She was considered by her coworkers to be an inspiration to all nurses. She was a lady of caring, service, and compassion, touching the lives of thousands of people during her active nursing career that spanned well over a half a century.

Upon graduation from Nursing School at St. Francis in 1928, she served for nine years as night supervisor. In 1937, she became supervisor of the obstetric floor. After three years she transferred to the care of surgical patients, remaining there until her retirement in the early 80s.

Her philosophy could best be expressed by quoting her own words: "Take each day as it comes from the hands of the Lord, confident that he is with you when you do his work." As one of her coworkers expressed it, "You can feel her inner tranquillity ... her gentle demeanor, peace in her eyes, and the brightness of her smile, that she has walked with God."

Sister Liguori was born in 1890, growing up on a large farm in the picturesque peaceful countryside of Midleton, County Cork, Ireland. Raising thoroughbred horses for the race tracks was her favorite hobby, since it was a family avocation. She developed a love and interest in horse racing at an early age, an interest that remained with her throughout her life.

Entering the Franciscans in 1923, she remained in France for two years in the program of initial religious formation. She arrived in Monroe in 1925, spending the first three years in professional training as a nurse. She nostalgically referred to these first three years as "boot training."

Sister Liguori was a strong advocate of patient care, with an unsurpassed concern for the promotion and instillation of Christian values in her coworkers. The values she portrayed left a definite impact on nursing care at St. Francis.

Throughout her long nursing career, she maintained a close working relationship with all members of the medical staff. Her extroverted personality and unforgettable Irish brogue endeared her to all. Always eager to meet people, she extended hospitality to each new member of the medical staff and made them feel at home.

Sister Liguori Lawton spent her life as a nurse on the floor of St. Francis. She epitomized

the work of the Franciscans at St. Francis, giving care and love to the sick. In honor to her over 60 years of selfless and untiring service, the Liguori Lawton Humanitarian Award was established in 1979 in order to honor a special employee each year. This award is the highest honor granted by St. Francis Medical Center.

Sister Liguori was held up as an example to the nurses at St. Francis. She was described as challenging the staff to love God more, to be more caring, and to be more conscientious. She was always a driving force to getting things done.

Sister Liguori died on March 19, 1987, following a prolonged illness which she courageously endured with a spirit of faith and resignation to God's will.

In honor of Sister Liguori, the St. Francis Medical Center established a \$100,000 Sister Liguori Lawton Endowed Professorship in Nursing at Northeast Louisiana University in memory of the Sister who devoted 62 years of her life to nursing at St. Francis.

### **Sister Lilian Bernard Lynch**

A native of Ireland, Sister Lilian came to the Lake in 1962. She received her nursing education at Marillac College in St. Louis. She served as Supervisor of the Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Department at Our Lady of the Lake. During this time, she was instrumental in the formation and organization of the Baton Rouge Eye Bank.

She has been very active in the governance of the Health System and the North American Province. She served on the Lake Board of Directors for a period of eight years, beginning in 1972. Her service included a term as Vice Chairperson of the Board. She also served a term as a member of the FMOL System Board of Trustees, serving as Secretary of the Board.

As a member of the order, she has also served a term on the Provincial Council of the North American Province.

As a Franciscan Sister, she has been especially interested in working with the poor and the homeless, mainly through Solidarity House. She also gave special attention to home-bound persons and their families.

### **Sister Linda Constantin**

By nature, Sister Linda is a gregarious person, a personality which has served her well in her ministry as a Franciscan Sister. She loves to mix with people, doing so with a bright smile, a friendly demeanor, and a jocular manner. Perhaps one of her better known contributions occurred during the move to unionize the employees at St. Francis. She played her guitar and sang, drumming up support for the vote against unionization.

During her career as a Franciscan, Sister Linda has served at each of the three hospitals. She headed the vocation program for a period of time. She currently serves as Vice President for Mission Effectiveness at Our Lady of the Lake. In that role, she conducts stimulating workshops

to help employees understand how their personal values relate to the medical center's mission. She has served a term on the Provincial Council and on the Board of Trustees of the FMOL Health System.

As a nurse, Sister Linda loved nursing on the surgical floor and later in the emergency room. Her quick-witted, personable and empathetic approach to people served her well. Yet she experienced problems in getting there. As a student, Sister Linda struggled with school work but excelled in leadership and sports. Later in life she discovered she was dyslexic. That knowledge helped her learn to cope with her problem, enabling her to complete the Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from Northeast Louisiana University and earn the Master's Degree from St. Bonaventure's University in New York.

Earlier in her career, she worked for the Diocese of Baton Rouge in religious education. Working with Father Donald Blanchard on something she had never done before, she designed and taught a course in religious education for adults over a period of five years. The course itself lasted for ten months on Saturday morning, and the enrollment ranged between 50-60 each time she offered it. She has also made numerous presentations to civic groups on dyslexia, freely talking about her problem and the means to cope with it.

Sister Linda has a contagious "joie de vivre". She enjoys athletic events and the festivities that go with it. She enjoys fishing, singing and playing the guitar, and enjoys life. Her philosophy is that "we only have one life so enjoy it as best as you can."

### **Sister Madeleine Lemoine**

Sister Madeleine, one of the few French Sisters to serve in Louisiana, was born in the Pas-de-Calais, France. She entered the Franciscan Missionaries in 1921 and came to Baton Rouge in 1923. A graduate in the first class of the Lake Nursing School in 1926, her entire career was served in Baton Rouge at the Lake. She died at the age of 92 in 1983.

With over 50 years of active service, Sister Madeleine served in many capacities. She performed a number of administrative capacities, most notably as Director of Purchasing. Additionally, she served in nursing, dietary and pharmacy roles at one time or another.

Sister is remembered by many, not only for her French accent, but more importantly for her warmth, interest and concern for those whom she served. She touched the hearts of a multitude of people as she quietly went about her long and fruitful ministry. She was one of the original five Sisters who served on the Board of Directors of the Lake when it was organized in 1956.

### **Sister Magdalen O'Donovan**

Sister Magdalen has had an active and productive career as a Franciscan, serving in each of the three hospitals owned and operated by the Franciscans in Louisiana. She served for some years as Administrator of St. Francis in Monroe and has held key positions in Our Lady of the Lake and Our Lady of Lourdes. During her years at the Lake, she headed skill care nursing and

supervised the operating rooms. At Lourdes, she served as nursing supervisor.

A lady with a lively personality, she put her whole self into whatever she was doing. Her life has been one of service with passion and dedication. This life style followed into her leisure time. An avid sports fan, she has been known to take off to watch the Saints play in New Orleans and the LSU Tigers in Baton Rouge, and she is also an avid follower of Notre Dame.

A native of County Cork, Ireland, she left there at the age of 18, entering the novitiate in France in 1937. During World War II she ministered to the sick, serving as a nurse's aide. In 1948, she came to Baton Rouge to begin her ministry in Louisiana. She entered nursing school at the Lake and furthered her education, obtaining a degree in nursing from Northwestern State University. Later, she earned a Master's Degree in Hospital Administration from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She also completed a course in surgery techniques at St. Joseph Hospital in Houston.

Her most distinguished service was as Administrator of St. Francis Hospital in Monroe. Her later years have been spent as head of skilled nursing at the Lake and as patient representative. During her years of service, she served on the Boards of Directors at St. Francis, Our Lady of the Lake, and Our Lady of Lourdes

### **Sister Margaret Ann Miller**

The story of Sister Margaret Ann Miller is a beautiful one. Inspired by Sister Liguori Lawton when she was a patient at St. Francis Hospital, she entered the novitiate at 21 years of age and went on to an outstanding career as a Franciscan Sister. Her early death at age 43 cut short her earthly career. As she was dying of bone cancer, she joyously planned her own funeral as she awaited her death.

Born Lorono Miller, with the family nickname of Ronnie, she was raised in a Catholic family of ten children in Monroe, Louisiana. She entered the novitiate in 1952, after doing some college work at Northeast Louisiana University. While in college she worked to help with family expenses.

Her career as a Franciscan Sister was marked by work to complete a Bachelor's in Business and a Nursing diploma from the Lake School of Nursing. She served in various capacities at the Lake: as Supervisor of the Obstetrics Department, working in the business operation of the Lake, and ultimately as Assistant Administrator of the Hospital.

Perhaps her greatest achievement was in the planning for the new Our Lady of the Lake facility on Essen Lane. Working with Mother Gertrude, the Regional Superior at the time, and J. B. Heroman, Administrator, she was instrumental in the design of the new facility. It was during this period that she was diagnosed with bone cancer. Unfortunately, she died before the facility was opened. It stands as a living monument to her planning and administrative capability.

Sister Margaret Ann served terms on the Board of Directors of the Lake and St. Francis. She also served as the Superior of Our Lady of the Lake Community.

### **Sister Martha O'Callaghan (Martha de Bethanie)**

Sister Martha, a loyal and faithful food manager, spent most of her 50 years of service behind the scenes in the kitchen, yet, as she readily acknowledged, it was a most important service to the patients. She headed the dietary department of Our Lady of the Lake from 1933 to 1949, the dietary department of St. Francis Hospital from 1949 to 1966, and the dietary department of Ollie Steele Burden Manor from 1966 to 1985. Upon her retirement to the in 1985, she continued to provide delicious meals at the Provincial House for the Sisters and guests in typical Franciscan hospitality. She was famous for her Irish soda bread and scones.

As a young Sister she longed to be missioned to Africa, but instead she was sent to the United States where Sisters were badly needed. In her own words she said, "It never bothered me not to be stationed in Africa. I never regretted anything. If God wants something, He'll find a way unless you start kicking, then He will find another."

A native of Cork, Ireland and the biological sister of Sister Thomas O'Callaghan, Sister Martha died on June 18, 1996.

### **Mother Marie (Mary) Brendan Donegan**

Mother Marie Brendan played a most significant role in the development of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette, serving as the first Administrator (Chief Executive Officer), opening the hospital in 1949. She has been described as a kind and gentle person and a "praying member" by her fellow Sisters.

Mother Marie Brendan joined the FMOL in 1923, going to the Motherhouse in Calais, France for her religious formation. In 1925, she came to the United States, going to St. Francis where she was trained as a nurse. She served as Director of Purchasing until 1935 when she became Administrator of St. Francis, serving in that position until 1949. She also was one of the original members of the St. Francis Board of Directors. She led St. Francis through the latter years of the Depression and World War II, difficult times for the hospital. She also served on the St. Francis Board of Directors from its inception in 1958 until 1971. During those years, she served as Secretary and/or Treasurer of the Board.

In 1956, Mother Marie Brendan returned from Lafayette to Monroe where she served as Director of Purchasing until 1976. She was transferred to Pastoral Ministries at her request. She spent her remaining years as a Sister in that capacity, finding the change very rewarding. She worked with her biological sister, Sister Edith Donegan. She expressed this feeling in her later years, "God gave me the courage to transcend all doubt, and I never retraced my steps."

### **Sister Martha Ann Abshire**

Sister Martha, together with Sister Althea Jonis, founded the Franciscan mission in Haiti. The project is a remarkable accomplishment, offering medical care to indigent Haitians who live in the mountainous region north of Aquin, a southwest Haitian town on the Caribbean Sea. This

is a pioneering enterprise of the Franciscans, and its tremendous success is due to the efforts of Sister Martha and Sister Althea, with the backstopping efforts of the FMOL Sisters and the FMOL Health System. Together with Sister Althea, Sister Martha faced the tremendous challenge of bringing health care to a poverty-stricken community. Sister Martha, a trained clinical nurse, filled a critical role in working with patients.

Sister Martha left the project in 1994 to serve on the General Council in Paris. This position assists the General Superior of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady who gives leadership to the worldwide activities of the Order. In 1998, she returned to service in Louisiana.

Sister Martha is one of the four Franciscans who came from Southwest Louisiana and are in the prime of their service to the people of Louisiana. In her career, she has served as a nurse at Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of the Lake. Her service as a nurse was followed by work in the Social Services Department at Lourdes and in the Internal Audit Department at the Lake.

She received the RN Diploma from the Lake School of Nursing and earned the Master's Degree in Health Care Administration from Notre Dame University.

### **Sister Mary Ann Sepulvado**

A native of Northwest Louisiana, Sister Mary Ann grew up in Sabine Parish. Even though her family was Catholic, the general environment in which she lived was Protestant. As a consequence, there was little contact with Catholics outside of her family. Her principal contact with the Church was through her parish priest and her family. Still, she felt the calling to the religious life.

She entered the novitiate at the Franciscan Provincial House in Baton Rouge with five other young women. Three of the six are still in the Order (Sister Kathleen Cain, Sister Earleen Desselle, and Sister Mary Ann). Sr. Mary Ann states: "My call to religious life has been a blessing to me in many ways. I truly love living the Franciscan life. It's a great source of strength, peace and joy in my spiritual journey with the Lord, the Franciscan Sisters and all God's people."

As a girl and as a young woman, she was an excellent athlete who enjoyed games and outdoor activities. Her favorite sports are basketball, tennis, and football.

After finishing the novitiate, she was assigned to St. Francis in Monroe where she completed the LPN studies. As Sister Mary Ann commented, "if you could pass under the tutelage of Sister Liguori, you could do the job", so she began her career as a floor nurse at St. Francis, a ministry that she enjoyed very much. One day while lifting a patient, the person fell on her and she suffered muscle damage. As it turned out, she was in the beginning stage of Muscular Dystrophy. This unfortunate circumstance has directly affected her ability to perform the duties of a nurse. Since that time, Sister Mary Ann's ministry has focused on duties as Sacristan for the chapel in the hospital and as a Eucharistic Minister. She also works in the pharmacy as a certified pharmacy technician.

In reflecting on her 30 years in the health care ministry, Sr. Mary Ann recalls one of her favorite quotes: "I am not afraid of tomorrow for I have seen yesterday and I love today!"

### **Sister Mary Elizabeth Gibbens**

Sister Mary Elizabeth Gibbens, a native of Baton Rouge, was widely known for her graciousness and gentle devotion to God. During her lifetime of service to the sick, she was always thankful for the opportunity to do "anything that can give a little praise to God."

Born into a devout Catholic family, she was the oldest of 10 children. She greatly admired Mother de Bethanie Crowley, a close friend of her mother's, and often visited the hospital. After high school, she went to work for the Lake, living with two friends near the hospital. The hospital was like a family to her.

In 1942, the Franciscans opened a novitiate in Baton Rouge, and she became the first local woman to enter the Order. Through the years, she served both at Our Lady of the Lake and Our Lady of Lourdes. She had a talent for making people feel loved, whether she was greeting new patients, serving in the business office, answering phone calls at the switchboard, or preparing the chapel for Mass. Sister Mary Elizabeth dearly loved her work, and it came through in the spirit and love she endowed on others as she went about her ministry.

Sister Mary Elizabeth was appointed as the first Franciscan administrator of the new Ollie Steele Burden Manor when it opened in the early 60s. Her aged father was among the first residents of the nursing home, and her family was very pleased that he was able to spend his last days in her care.

Upon her retirement as Administrator of the Manor, Sister Elizabeth returned to the Lake to what she called "the best job in the world." To Sister Mary Elizabeth, preparing the chapel in the Lake for daily Mass was a labor of special honor. At the time she commented, "I was very happy doing that for the Lord - being so close to Him all of the time."

Sister Mary Elizabeth passed away in 1995, and she is buried in the Franciscan plot in Roselawn Cemetery in Baton Rouge.

### **Sister Mary Michael Twohig**

Born Margaret Twohig in County Cork, Ireland, Sister Mary Michael was the third child in a family of seven. After completing her primary education, she joined in the house chores at the family homestead. Even though she participated fully in teenage life, during her early years she heard the call to religious life. After some encouragement and direction from the Presentation Sisters, she made up her mind at age 19 to leave her native land and give her all to the service of Almighty God and his people, taking the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Franciscan Order. In 1934, with three other young women, she sailed to Calais, France.

The separation from family was not easy in those days. The rule of the Franciscans called for almost complete separation. There would be no more visits to family or homeland.

She assumed the sacrifice wholeheartedly. The words of the Gospel gave her comfort and courage: "Whoever leaves father and mother will receive a hundred fold..." (Mark 10:29-30).

She took the name of Sister Mary Michael and was assigned to various ministries in the Calais area, giving her an opportunity to learn the French language and adjust to the culture.

In 1937, the Louisiana mission was expanding and additional Sisters were needed. In May of that year, Sister Mary Michael, along with three other Sisters, set sail aboard the "Champion" for the New World. Docking at Cobb, Ireland for a few hours, they bid a nostalgic goodbye to their native shores and proceeded to cross the Atlantic.

After a train ride from New York which lasted two nights and a day, arriving in Monroe was a bit overwhelming. The heat and humidity were almost unbearable. Those were the days before air conditioning, and a few fans placed here and there were all they had, requiring the young Sisters to adjust to a new climate and culture in addition to orienting themselves to a new mission.

In 1945, after three years of study, Sister Mary Michael received her nursing diploma, and she began her nursing ministry at St. Francis. In 1949, Sister Mary Michael returned to Ireland on her first visit. Upon her return she was transferred to Our Lady of the Lake in Baton Rouge as Supervisor of Surgery. She worked there until 1952, when she was stricken by illness. She died in 1954 and is buried in Roselawn Cemetery.

### **Mother Mary of Nazareth McGinn**

Mother Mary of Nazareth was the second Administrator of St. Francis Sanitarium, succeeding Mother de Bethanie when she moved to Baton Rouge to open Our Lady of the Lake Sanitarium. She served also as local Superior of the Sisters in Monroe. Her period of service as Administrator spanned 15 years, ending in 1938.

Her tenure as Administrator was a difficult one. She guided St. Francis successfully through the early years of the Great Depression, even adding 45 beds to the hospital as part of an annex building, including an OB floor and the installation of additional x-ray equipment. The focus of the addition was to provide for quality care for patients.

In her later years as a Sister, Mother Mary served as Purchasing Agent at St. Francis.

Mother Mary passed away in 1967, having given 54 years of service to St. Francis.

She was aptly described as a soft-spoken and modest person. Her many beautiful qualities endeared her to the people she served. She displayed a deep respect for each person with whom she came in contact. Her employees spoke lovingly of her kindness and understanding as an administrator.

### **Sister Mary Theresa Crowley (Sister Marie Therese and Sister Kevin)**

Mary Crowley was born in 1911 in the picturesque countryside of Inner Ardroom, bordering County Cork and County Kerry, Ireland. No artist could capture the wild and natural beauty of this little town. The Crowley homestead was built on a farm in the center of spacious fields of hay, corn, wheat, barley and other crops grown to provide food for the many animals raised by the family. It was surrounded by rolling hills while, at the same time, faced out to the broad and rugged Atlantic. Mary was the only girl and the last child of the five children born to her parents. She was not exposed to the farm chores as other Irish children were. Little is known of her early life except that she was a reticent youngster and the Crowleys were a very close-knit family. Her mother was a school teacher and her father and brothers tended the farm. At some point in the early 1900s, her mother's brother immigrated to the United States, studied law and later practiced as a judge in Montana. Her brother John also immigrated. He and his family settled in Rhode Island.

Mary responded to the call to religious life, and at 19 years old she decided to leave her "all" and follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. She braved the separation from home and loved ones and set out for Calais, France, where she adjusted readily to the culture and language. After her initial education, she took her religious vows and was given the name of Sister Kevin, later changed to Sister Marie Therese.

Her early years as a religious were spent in Berck, Pas-de-Calais, a sanitarium for children with bone disease, often tuberculosis. Children from all over France and even other countries were treated in this modern sanitarium across the English Channel. It is said that the iodine in the sea air aided healing and strengthened the bones. The bed capacity of this sanitarium which treated children and young adults up to 20 years of age, many of whom were bedridden, was about 200. Sister worked with the children several years until the war broke out and part of the institution was occupied by German soldiers. Sister gave of herself generously always with kindness and compassion to the children entrusted to her care.

After some years, she was missioned to the Order's institution in the southeast of France, Hauteville, and Aisne. Here she again ministered unselfishly to young adults who were suffering from tuberculosis of the lungs.

In 1952, the United States mission was expanding, and English-speaking Sisters were needed to help carry on the ministry. Sister Marie Therese was called to give up her second home of 20 years and come to Monroe. Sister joyfully packed her belongings, crossed the Atlantic and again gave herself generously to the demands of her new ministry which involved providing linen service for the patients and also preparing the hospital chapel for daily liturgies and services. Sister performed her chore meticulously, realizing that no matter what the task was, it was being done for the Lord and contributed to the well-being of patients.

After several years of service, Sister was stricken with cancer. She suffered much but always cheerfully and with faith and resignation. While ill, she had the pleasure of visiting her brother and his family in Rhode Island.

On November 11, 1976, Sister Marie Therese succumbed to her illness and peacefully went to meet her God and reap her reward for a life of service to His people. She was laid to rest

in St. Matthew's Cemetery, alongside the Sisters with whom she shared life and love.

### **Sister St. Michael O'Shea**

Sister St. Michael was one of the Sisters who devoted her whole life to nursing on the floor. A native of Kilkenny, Ireland, she came to Our Lady of the Lake in 1926, two years after becoming a member of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. She was a member of the third graduating class of Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing in 1929. She began her nursing career at Our Lady of the Lake and served until her retirement, giving a total of 45 years of service to Our Lady of the Lake Hospital.

Sister St. Michael was night supervisor in the emergency room, long before the emergency room was the modern unit it is today. In those days, Sister St. Michael would unlock the door to admit, treat, and clean up after patients in the middle of the night. She fed personnel, patients, doctors and even ambulance drivers by night and by day. From the emergency room, she moved to the third floor as supervisor. Then she moved to EENT where she remained until her retirement. There was a mutual reverence between Sister St. Michael and the nurses and doctors on EENT.

Sister St. Michael had a sincere love for her work and for all of God's creatures. If one did not know her, mere words could not describe her. If one did know her, words could not say enough. Perhaps Mother Margaret Anne best described Sister St. Michael when she said, "Sister St. Michael demonstrated what it was to be a nurse."

Sister St. Michael was a collector, but, unlike most collectors, she collected to give to others, rather than to keep for herself. Mostly, Sister St. Michael collected people and friends. And mostly what she gave of was herself.

Sister St. Michael loved animals, especially the swans on the lake behind the old hospital. During her retirement, she watched the swans for hours on end; each was named and meant something special to her.

### **Sister St. Patrick Comerford**

A beautiful portrait of Sister St. Patrick hangs in honor in the main lobby of St. Francis Medical Center. It is not only a tribute to Sister Pat, as she was called, but a tribute to the many unsung Sisters who came from a foreign land to serve the sick in Northeast Louisiana. They did it, as did Sister Patrick, by spending their lives as nurses on the floors of the hospital, tending to the needs of the sick. In her earlier years, she handled the men's floor and the emergency room, including the drunks who were hospitalized or who simply came to sleep it off.

A native of Coolrahan, Kilkenny, Ireland, she went to France in 1918 to enter the novitiate, and in 1921 came to Monroe to begin her work at St. Francis. In 1924, she became a registered nurse upon the completion of her training program in Nursing School at St. Francis.

She was active in the governance of St. Francis. She was an officer and member of the

early Board of Directors, serving from 1958-1963 as Treasurer. She was also very active in the Nursing School until its closure in 1952. In her later years, she worked in Pastoral Care, serving there until her retirement in 1977.

In the words of an anonymous source, we see Sister St. Patrick as ... "the woman who walked the halls until she could walk no more ... the woman who watched over her patients and her staff until she could watch no more ... the woman who listened and gave counsel until her hearing failed ... the woman who reached out beyond the walls of St. Francis and used the telephone to reach those in need of comfort ..."

Sister St. Patrick died at age 94 in 1977, after having dedicated 56 years of her life to medical service at St. Francis. In the words of a fellow Sister, "The most outstanding memory I have of Sister St. Patrick was how authentic she was in everything. She lived what she believed and gave herself to her fellow men from the last and the greatest: A great example for all of us."

### **Sister Mary Patricia Hennessy**

Sister Patricia arrived in the U.S. in 1919 to serve as a surgical nurse at St. Francis. She also served at Our Lady of the Lake where she held the position of Surgical Room Supervisor. She returned to Ireland to open a Franciscan house in 1929. This house was used as a recruiting base for new Sisters, who would remain there for some months before going to France for training. She was a cousin of Mother Gertrude Hennessy.

### **Sister Pauline O'Sullivan**

Sister Pauline O' Sullivan is one of the latter day giants in the development of the FMOL Health System. A soft-spoken, but determined woman, she led the Franciscans in the move from three independent hospitals to a coordinated health system, working in greater concert with each other. Those were difficult days, harnessing the three separate administrative operations into a coordinated system operation. Needless to say, there was much "kicking and screaming" as she worked assiduously to bring the three medical centers into closer coordination with each other. Her tenaciousness and doggedness kept the system concept moving forward to face the future in health care. In short, she presided over a major change for the North American Province of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady.

A native of Ireland, Sister Pauline came to the United States in 1949 and received her R.N. from Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing. She went back to Ireland in 1956 to do recruiting work for the Order until 1972 when she returned to Louisiana. Sr. Pauline served at both Our Lady of the Lake and St. Francis before becoming Provincial Superior and the first President of the newly created Health System. At the completion of her second term in 1994, she returned to her native Ireland where she serves in St. Francis Hospital Ballinderry, Mullingar, County Westmeath.

During her career in Louisiana, she made major contributions to Our Lady of the Lake and St. Francis Hospitals, serving in nursing and supervisory roles. At the Lake, she served as a floor supervisor. At St. Francis she served in many capacities, including floor nurse and later as

Senior Vice President for Nursing. She also headed social services and pastoral care as part of her service.

### **Sister Mary Reginald Martinez**

Sister Mary Reginald served for many years at Our Lady of the Lake as Admissions Director. She also served as Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Lake in its early days before lay people became involved.

### **Sister Mary Reginald Slattery**

A one-story frame building named St. Francis Colored Ward served as a hospital setting for the African American community of Monroe and the surrounding areas for a period of 23 years. The "colored ward" was situated adjacent to the main hospital building at the corner of Catalpa and Wood Streets. Sister Mary Reginald Slattery, who came to Monroe in 1913 from her native Ireland, was assigned the position of Nursing Supervisor of the facility. In addition to her excellent nursing skills, Sister Reginald brought caring, compassion and commitment to her patients.

Sister had an African American attendant named John Allen whom she referred to as her first assistant, while John laughingly named himself the "straw boss" of the colored ward. Both Sister Reginald and John worked a twelve-hour shift. Since neither were clock-watchers, it was not unusual to see them remain at their post long after quitting time if there were sick patients who needed extra special nursing care.

Sister Reginald had well established communication lines in her department. She had instructed the student nurses to report to John in her absence. He was updated on the status of any acutely ill patient on the ward just in case the attending physician called in or made rounds.

The Director of Nursing was always eager to assign nursing students for clinical experience to Sister Reginald's service. She found Sister to be a perfect role model. Even though St. Francis did not have a mission statement in those early years, Sister Reginald in her uniqueness exemplified all the values expressed in the mission statement of today. Student nurses enjoyed the opportunity of acquiring proficiency in nursing skills under the guidance and leadership of Sister Reginald.

In one large ward, medical surgical, G.U. and orthopedic patients were grouped together. John Allen's loud contagious laughter could be heard over the low droning of the fan which he had placed in the center of the ward in a sometimes futile effort to cool things off for his patients. While John Alien's job description encompassed a wide variety of activities, apparently he never seemed to mind hard work or long hours. He had learned from observing Sister Reginald to take each day as the Lord sent it.

Sister Reginald was by all accounts a quiet and unassuming person. Nonetheless, when an occasion arose to speak out and defend her patients, her actions usually spoke louder than her words. The following anecdote, related by former nursing students, is recorded so as to

substantiate the above description of Sister. It appears that a lynch mob was interested in one of Sister Reginald's patients. Sister was unwilling to let the mob enter the building. Standing behind a window facing the front entrance to the building. Sister was in full view of the mob. With a cold stare on her face, Sister held a gun in position, aimed and ready to shoot the first one of the gang who dared to enter. Noting the pistol in Sister's hand, the mob looked at each other for a few seconds and then silently departed, not knowing that this was the first time in her life Sister Reginald had held a gun in her hand. Not only did she not know how to shoot, but the gun was not loaded.

Although the above scenario may sound like the making of a Hollywood western, some reliable old timers who witnessed the scene say it actually happened as described.

However, the "reliable old times" failed to acknowledge or give credit to the man behind the scene. John Allen had carefully coached Sister Reginald ahead of time in the necessary skills required to aim the gun like a professional. We are told that the old gun belonged to John who stated that he used it to hunt and shoot possum.

John rightfully took credit for the coaching lessons he had given free of charge to Sister Reginald. He shared the excitement and fun along with the student nurses who witnessed the scene from a distance. It was later recorded that John Allen could be heard whistling the tune, "Davey, Davey Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier," as he happily went about performing his routine chores during the ensuing days.

In subsequent years, Sister Reginald's health began to fail and she was obliged to hand the torch over to another dedicated Franciscan Sister.

By 1935, the colored ward was rapidly showing signs of having outlived its usefulness as a building. In 1936 it was replaced by a modern red brick building which was named Reginald Hall in memory of Sister Mary Reginald Slattery who had given many years of her religious life to the service of the African American community.

Sister Reginald passed away in 1938. The devoted love and attention, which she willingly gave to others, is an inspiration to all of us.

### **Sister Rita Boyle**

Sister Rita spent a full and generous life as a Franciscan Sister. She was a person of many talents, enjoying the arts and poetry, with Shakespeare heading the list of her favorites.

Another of the many talented Irish women who came to serve the people of Louisiana, she served at Our Lady of the Lake for over 40 years. Among her assignments were Director of Novices and Director of the School of Nursing.

As a Franciscan Sister, she served as local superior at the Provincial House in Baton Rouge from 1970-76.

A very thoughtful person, while on a retreat during her years of service, she examined her calling as a Franciscan, "Why God chose me is a mystery that I cannot explain even to myself. But I do not need to explain it, but in love and generosity give myself to God, confident that His grace will never fail . . . During those privileged days I thought long and often about my call . . . And how I am to live in today's world." In summary of her retreat, she said that St. Francis assured her that, "The essentials of Christian and religious life do not change. Gospel values, community living, service - these are the very essence of a life lived for God and our brothers in Christ. "

From all accounts, she left an indelible mark on the women she educated and nurtured as they moved through the novitiate.

### **Sister Rita Lanie**

A native of New Iberia, Sister Rita's call to the sisterhood is a beautiful manifestation of the blessings from Almighty God in his call to service for others. A graduate of Sacred Heart Academy at Grand Coteau, Louisiana, the call to religious life was present early in her life, but taking care of her aging parents was what she was called to do first, being the youngest of seven siblings. After her father died in 1978, she began to consider seriously joining a religious order. After her mother passed away in 1989, she decided to join the Franciscans in Louisiana, beginning her formation as a Franciscan Sister in Baton Rouge.

Asked why she chose the Franciscans, she responded, "The Franciscans recognize any career that you are in, even though we are primarily in health care." After high school, Sister Rita did clerical work near her home in Jeanerette, Louisiana. She enjoyed that type of work very much, and this proclivity followed her into the Franciscan Order where she works in the business office at Our Lady of the Lake. She commented, "I found my niche there." Commenting further, she said, "Coming into religious life, I knew what the world outside offered."

She was also encouraged to join the Franciscans by a long time friend who had been a Franciscan. She reinforced the nature of community life and what to expect. One of the benefits to herself has been to recognize and accept that she is introverted by nature, and that is part of who she is.

### **Sister Rose Marie Fitzgerald**

Early in her career, Sister Rose Marie was known as Sister Bathilde. Sister Rose Marie was another of the Irish Sisters who had a very distinguished career as a Franciscan in Louisiana. She served in each of the three hospitals as well as Ollie Steele Burden Manor where she served as Administrator from 1970-1985.

A nurse by training, she received the R.N. Diploma from the Lake School of Nursing. She served as Supervisor of Nursing at both St. Francis and Our Lady of the Lake. She also served as Purchasing Agent at Our Lady of Lourdes. She was a charter member of the Lake Board of Directors.

The Fitzgeralds gave two daughters to the Franciscans. At the time Sister Rose Marie entered the Franciscans in 1937, she was joined by her sibling, who took the name of Sister Mary Columba. Sister Mary Columba served in the foreign missions and in England. Both of the Sisters served in France during World War II.

### **Sister Susan Johnston**

Sister Susan was one of the large group of American women who joined the Franciscans in the 50s and 60s. Like many of them she was much interested in the social apostolate as contrasted with the earlier emphasis on health care. Working at Our Lady of Lourdes, she also worked in St. Genevieve's in Lafayette and in the ministry in the Franciscan House of Praise at Grosse Tete. She served as a nurse at Our Lady of the Lake as well as on the Lake Board of Directors. She also served a term as Vocation Directress for the Franciscans.

### **Sister Susan Moncla**

Sister Susan comes from the heart of the Cajun country. She was born and raised in Baldwin, Louisiana, located on the Bayou Teche. She joined the Franciscans as part of their recruiting efforts among American women. She enjoyed a very productive career as a Sister. Although she began her career as a nurse, she later branched out into the social apostolate, working both in religious education and pastoral ministry. She served both at Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of the Lake. Subsequently, she did graduate work in Franciscan studies at St. Bonaventure's University in New York City. Her last assignment as a Franciscan was at St. Jude's Catholic Church in Baton Rouge where she served as Director of Religious Education.

Sister Susan was a very active leader in the Franciscan community. She served on the Provincial Council for the North American Province as Assistant Provincial. She also served on the Board of Directors of Our Lady of the Lake.

Since becoming laicized in 1998, she has returned to her original calling as a nurse at Our Lady of the Lake.

### **Sister Theresita Crowley**

Sister Theresita served as a pediatric nurse at St. Francis from 1933-56. Sister Anne Marie Twohig had this to say about her, "Her nursing career was marked by her untiring dedication to suffering humanity, and especially to the patients in Reginald Hall. She gave of herself in delivery, newborn nursery and pediatrics, as well as to the adult medical and surgical patients. Sister Theresita not only nursed her patients back to health, but touched their lives in many ways and brought them closer to God."

In 1956, Sister Theresita moved to Our Lady of Lourdes where she continued to devote most of her time in pediatrics, spending 18 years in that assignment. Her remaining seven years of service were spent in pastoral care. She celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 1980. At this event she said, "My journey through 50 years was one event that made me forget about myself and deepened my prayer life. It has been a time well spent in the care of the sick."

Dudley Romero, who served with her at Lourdes, called her soft-spoken and very spiritual, saintly in her word and manner. Her big thing was praying with the ill, especially with the premature babies.

### **Sister Mary Timothy Lyons**

Sister Mary Timothy was a native of County Cork, Ireland where she received basic training in hotel management. She came to the United States in 1964, and became supervisor of Our Lady of the Lake dietary department. In 1968 she moved to Our Lady of Lourdes to serve as food manager of the dietary and cafeteria department.

### **Sister Thomas O'Callaghan**

Food Service is one of the unsung but crucial services in a hospital. This is where Sister Thomas spent most of her career. She served as Food Service Supervisor, first at St. Francis then at Our Lady of the Lake.

After retiring from the hustle and bustle of food service, she spent the later years of her ministry at Ollie Steele Burden Manor where she served in pastoral ministry as a Eucharistic Minister. Sister Thomas celebrated her Golden Jubilee as a Franciscan Sister in 1982. The biological sister of Sr. Martha O'Callaghan, she died in 1987 and is buried in Roselawn Cemetery in Baton Rouge.

### **Sister Uyen Vu**

Sister Uyen, the youngest of the Franciscan Sisters serving in Louisiana, is one of three Vietnamese Sisters in the North American Province. Her vocation came early in her life, but the Vietnamese war delayed the possibility for her until she came to the United States in 1989. Her path in getting to the United States was long and difficult.

Born to a middle class family in Vietnam, she lived a secure and comfortable life until 1975 when the Communists from North Vietnam took over Vietnam, occupying Saigon. Her father was arrested and imprisoned, and the family fled to the wilderness. The family built a small hut, raised animals, and planted a vegetable garden. It was there that Sister Uyen decided to become a Sister.

In those years, her mother lived and labored in a distant town to help feed the family, while Sister Uyen helped her grandmother with chores and took care of her younger brother and sister. As part of this process she taught them to pray devoutly for the family's deliverance. In 1984, their prayers were answered. Sister Uyen's father was released from prison. He quickly began to build a boat for them to escape. Their first attempt failed. They were captured and imprisoned for several months. After their release, her father worked for more than a year to build another boat. This time they succeeded, setting out for Malaysia. Arriving in Malaysia, they spent 18 months in a refugee camp.

Flown to New Orleans by the United Nations Refugee Service in 1989, Sister Uyen's family joined relatives who had emigrated ten years earlier. Then she went to high school. During her first summer in New Orleans, Sister Uyen became friends with a neighbor who introduced her to Sister Ann Catherine Nguyen, a member of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in Baton Rouge. After graduating from high school in 1992, she joined the Franciscans. Her first assignment was as a nurse's aide at Ollie Steele Burden Manor, realizing a dream that had begun years earlier in Vietnam, that of being an instrument of God in a healing ministry. Sr. Uyen graduated from Our Lady of the Lake College in 2000 and began nursing at Our Lady of Lourdes.

### **Sister Vernola Lyons**

Sister Vernola is a native of Southwest Louisiana, coming from the small community of Mire. She received the R.N. Diploma from McNeese State University, and the C.P.E. in Pastoral Care from St. Louis University. She has served as a nurse at Our Lady of the Lake and at Our Lady of Lourdes. She has worked in the nursery and served also in emergency, medical and surgery units. She also worked with the Diocese of Lafayette in services to the poor.

### **Sister Veronica Dorgan**

Sister Veronica entered the Order of Franciscans in 1935, entering the convent at Calais, France. She took her first vows in 1938, and her final vows in 1945. A native of County Cork, Ireland, she came to the United States in 1938. Her hobbies were reading, knitting, and sewing.

Sister Veronica's special calling was prayer for those in need and cleanliness in the hospital. She spent her active career in Our Lady of the Lake Hospital laundry, ensuring that the laundry was properly done and folded in preparation for use in the hospital. Sister Veronica's special gift was loving people. Many have sensed her prayers for them welling up from the hospital laundry.

She was recruited by Mother de Bethanie. She entered the Order, expecting to help lots of people through her prayers. After completing her training at Calais, she was delighted to be assigned to English-speaking America. She immediately befriended people in the hospital's laundry room and dining room. She confided in an interview, "I like to give people a smile when I meet them." Because of her friendliness and openness people often smiled first at her, and she became well known for her random acts of kindness.

Quiet and unassuming, she helped take care of the Sisters' dining room at lunch and brought back coffee for the laundry employees. She also knitted booties for the newborn babies of employees. She also sold some of her fancy, multi-colored booties to earn money for the missions.

Her most unique talent was prayer. When seriously ill people asked the Sisters to pray for them, Sister Veronica was often asked to do the praying. There was a strong belief that she had a close relationship with the Lord.

Sister Veronica also prayed for the hospital, that people would make the right decisions, and that problems would be smoothed over. Her philosophy was, "I help where I can." She also prayed for many people in the hospital stating, "We have to have faith to look inside people and love them."

As she looked back on her career, she indicated that she was delighted to have served God as a Franciscan Sister, and she was especially thankful that she had the chance to pray for so many sick people.

### **Sister Eileen Corcoran's Diary**

I was born in a little town in the southwest of Ireland named Dromdeega, approximately 32 miles from the city of Cork. My parents were Patrick and Margaret O'Brien Corcoran. There were five children in the family, two girls and three boys. I was the second oldest girl. I attended the public high school (in Ireland called the National School).

At that time Mother de Bethanie Crowley (our American Foundress), and her cousin, Sister Patricia Hennessey, had opened up a Vocation Recruitment Center in Cork. Sister Patricia was Vocations Directress. They were seeking candidates who might be interested in the Franciscan way of life. During my high school years, Mother de Bethanie visited us a few times. She distributed literature on the life of St. Francis which I read avidly, though perhaps more from curiosity than anything else. With a certain amount of pride in her accomplishments Mother de Bethanie told us about the two hospitals that she had founded in Louisiana and the shortage of English speaking Sisters to staff the institutions.

Mother was a great spokesperson for the order and represented the Franciscan Sisters in a very credible manner. But at the time I was enjoying life to the fullest and I was not at all sure that God was asking this sacrifice of me. My mother was also in failing health and I was hesitant to leave her since I was the last girl in the family. But she advised me to seek further guidance and pray over any decision that I might make.

My sibling, Sister Edana, had been in the convent for about two years in France as a Franciscan Sister of Calais. Sister Edana wrote frequently; she seemed extremely happy and fulfilled in her decision.

A mission was held at my home church. It was preached by a Redemptorist Priest who scared the devil out of us. During the week-long mission, he dwelt on the four last things which he used as his central theme, namely: death, judgment, heaven, or hell. If I recall rightly, he never spoke of the goodness of God. Following a period of further reflection and guidance from my parish priest, I humbly made my decision to enter the Franciscans Sisters of Calais.

On November 1, 1931, I left home, and after spending a few days at the Recruiting Center in Cork, Mother de Bethanie, another young lady and I sailed by boat to Calais, France where I entered the novitiate. I experienced pangs of loneliness for a few months; getting accustomed to a new culture and a new language was not at all easy. We were not permitted to speak any English. However, we took French classes from one of our Irish Sisters. She was also

in the novitiate.

At the end of my first year, I was assigned to work with children in Berck Plage. I enjoyed my interaction with the young people. It helped me to regain confidence and develop a better understanding of the French language. I made my first profession in May 1934. I was told then by Mother de Bethanie, who was visiting us that I was already assigned to go to the United States of America in Louisiana in October of that year.

I would have liked very much to have had an opportunity to visit my family in Ireland before I left the country. But I was informed that it was not permitted. Mother De Bethanie did tell me that I would definitely get to come home in six or seven years. Actually it was 13 years later that I laid my eyes on the green hills of Ireland. By that time my three brothers had all grown and left home. My parents were much older but still in fairly good health. They were glad to see us and extremely happy that we had chosen our special way of life.

### **Sharing of Memories**

On October 21, 1997, I celebrated the 60th anniversary of my arrival in the United States. It brings the memories associated with that experience.

Four days earlier (October 17, 1937), we were eight Franciscan Sisters of Calais who set sail from La Havre, France en route to New York by boat. Following disembarkation in New York, we went through customs, and gave hurried good byes to four of our members who boarded a train destined for Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The other four Sisters, including myself, headed for Monroe, Louisiana. As the train rolled along the open countryside in the ever changing beauty of that memorable autumn morning, I can well imagine that I was eagerly anticipating seeing our Monroe community and Sisters.

Arriving in the mid-morning hours, we entered the Sanitarium by the side door, the Wood Street entrance. As we hurried through a dimly lit basement, my attention was suddenly diverted by the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. This duly compensated for the cabin fever and fatigue we experienced on the transatlantic voyage and the three day train journey with its several stops in between.

A hearty welcome and a delicious breakfast awaited us on arrival. We were introduced to 19 Sisters, some of whom we had already met in France. Eighteen of those Sisters were Irish and one unforgettable Sister was French, Sister Marie Angelique, who spoke very little English. Nevertheless when an occasion presented itself, Sister always managed to get her message across.

In 1964 the Mayor of Monroe presented Sister Angelique with a certificate of merit for her services to the Monroe community. Sister, in turn, thanked him profusely in her gracious French-American style. Sister Angelique was a very gifted individual. She was our organist, she sang beautifully (both alto and soprano), was artistic and taught needlepoint and tatting to the daughters of some of the early French settlers who resided in Monroe. Sister Angelique was the last living member of the pioneer Franciscan Sisters who had come to Monroe with Mother de

Bethanie Crowley to found the institution in 1911. She passed away in 1967. Our foundress, Mother de Bethanie, died in 1947. She is buried in Ireland.

Sister Mary Brendan Donegan was both Administrator and local Superior at St. Francis Sanitarium when I came to Monroe. She was a member of our travel crew. We shared the journey together from Calais, France to Monroe, Louisiana.

I was not particularly interested in the nursing profession in 1937, but Sister Mary Brendan reminded me that there were no other options available. Health care was our primary ministry in Louisiana. It was the ministry that our founders were requested to establish 26 years earlier. I enrolled in the three year nursing diploma program in 1938 and graduated in 1941. Eighteen years later I obtained a B.S. Degree in Nursing from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches.

In 1942 I was assigned the position of Night Supervisor for the hospital from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. seven nights a week. In preparation for this responsibility I took a crash course in hematology and routine x-rays. The objective was to help eliminate night calls for the lab tech and radiology departments.

Judging by today's health care standards, the decade of the 40s could still be classified as the Dark Ages of Medicine.

Even though St. Francis Sanitarium reported in the archives that there were 16 physicians on the hospital staff at the end of the first year of the department, the field of radiology as a science seemed to be at a standstill for many more years. Some staff members felt the installation of a large x-ray department was not a priority that needed to be addressed at that time. They continued to rely on the use of the stethoscope to aid them in making the correct diagnosis. Hence it was common practice for some physicians to carry a little book that contained their "basic medical tools". In 1929 an expansion program was initiated at St. Francis which included moving x-ray, from one room in the basement, to the second floor where a more spacious department was opened up. Actually it was not until the mid 50s and early 60s perhaps, that radiology at St. Francis began to climb to its rightful place under the administration of Mother Gertrude Hennessy and the direction of Dr. Oliver Vreeland, a graduate of Mayo Clinic.

In the 1940s St. Francis had approximately 100 physicians on the staff, but they began to dwindle rapidly as many were called into the armed services. Those who remained at home had to work longer hours. Up until this time, St. Francis had a physicians' residency program that was very helpful. It was discontinued as the residents enlisted in the armed forces.

Dr. Fred Marx, a Monroe physician, now retired, stated that he returned to Monroe in 1945 and applied for a one-year residency just as a refresher course, following his discharge from the United States Army. Those of us who knew Dr. Marx were well aware that he had a special knack of making history come alive. During a recent conversation, he informed me that Sister Mary Brendan Donegan, the administrator at St. Francis at the time, gave him his first job and he recorded the details which lost none of the flavor in the telling. She offered him free room and board, plus a little stipend in exchange for his medical services. Dr. Marx's job description

included taking care of the emergency room at night and delivering babies if the patient's doctor was unable to get to the hospital on time. He remembered that it often happened that doctors couldn't make it, since the Missouri Pacific railroad crossing could hold up traffic for 10 minutes if it was on the tracks. Dr. Marx also assisted the surgeons in the operating room and visited the acutely ill patients.

As I recall, the most common diseases requiring hospital admission in those days were as follows: swamp fever, malaria, la grippe (flu), dropsy, typhoid fever, acute alcoholic detoxification syndrome, and a small percentage of polio cases in the iron lung.

During Dr. Marx's tenure, he credited himself with establishing a Surgical Tissue Committee. He felt that there was a little too much unnecessary surgery being performed. In conjunction with the Red Cross, he helped establish a blood bank in Monroe (not at St. Francis).

Sister Mary Brendan Donegan shared her memories of the 40s from an administrative perspective in the following statements:

-She had to make daily trips to the Ration Board to secure enough points in order to provide sufficient food, both for the patients and hospital staff.

-She felt that we would not have survived the Great Depression without the Sisters' farm, which was located in West Monroe. At that time we had a huge garden which provided most of the vegetables needed to feed the patients. We also raised chickens and turkeys.

FMOL crafted our first mission statement in 1960. In the early days we did not have a mission statement to aid value clarification, but we had Sister supervisors who served as role models. These women represented the institution to both patients and staff in a credible fashion. They introduced the concept of focused care to the nursing staff long before it was described in nursing literature.

In the absence of the maid or attendant, Sister Liguori didn't hesitate to assign housekeeping duties to the nursing students such as cleaning rooms and procuring linens from the laundry. She was always right there helping, encouraging and instructing her staff, based on the premise that everything the nurse did had to be focused on the well being of the patient. As far as I recall most of our patients did not require a lot of sedation for pain. If they needed a narcotic, the nurse had to sterilize her syringe in a pan of hot water, draw up to one cc. of sterile water and drop a Morphine or Delaudid tablet in the solution of hot water, wait for the medicine to dissolve, and administer the drug to the patient. Incidentally, each nurse kept her personal 2cc. syringe and her thermometer in her uniform pocket. Being caught without those essentials could cause a student nurse to be campused. Early ambulation for post-operative patients was unheard of. One week of complete bed rest was considered the norm following a routine appendectomy.

I feel that a book should be written describing the many humorous incidents and sometimes scary anecdotes passed down by word of mouth from nurses who knew and worked with Sisters Pat, Liguori, and Reginald during their long and colorful careers as nursing supervisors at St. Francis. There is a definite need to tell our humorous stories because in the not too distant future there will not be anyone around to help recapture the spirit and history of our founders who blazed the trail.

At this point I will take the liberty to share an amusing incident which happened during my last year of nursing, while working the graveyard shift. We had a large six-bed ward on the first floor of the Sanitarium adjacent to the stairway and nurses station. It was named room 112, usually all MOPRR were assigned to the ward. Patients were not separated according to diagnosis, so it was not unusual to see medical, surgical, orthopedic, and frequently a few chronic alcoholics undergoing detoxification all in the same ward. All shared space in this open ward for the modest fee of six dollars a day, plus a dollar extra for the use of a fan. If the weather was not too cold, patients who were ambulatory could get up, go out on the back porch and enjoy the fresh air.

The Director of Nursing usually assigned students to this ward for clinical experience under the watchful eye of Sister Pat who always claimed that she had 20/20 vision and kept things under tight control. This incident happened almost on the stroke of midnight. A patient walked up to the nurse's station, appearing both excited and embarrassed. He was a real countrified gentleman. One of the student nurses and myself were at the nurse's station. Addressing me, he said, "What I am going to tell you ain't none of my business, but I feel you should know. Old Jack Kelly done got out of his bed. He told me that he's headed up town to the Shamrock Bar for a last drink before the bar closes for the night." He paused for a moment to regain his composure then added, "Jack ain't got a stitch of clothes on but his short tail hospital gown open all the way down the back." Hearing this we felt that we heard more than enough. He knew that we had better go out there and try to find him. I grabbed a sheet from the linen closet, and the nurse and I headed up town. Soon we caught sight of Jack about a block ahead of us. We hastened our steps and caught up with him. Draping the sheet around Jack's shoulders we took him by the arm and headed back to the hospital. On our way back we had to pass by the Alvis Hotel, a permanent landmark in Monroe where salesmen and other people stayed in Monroe while on business at that time. People stared at us, me and my long white robe and veil. Jack barefooted and draped in a sheet, and the student nurse with her short sleeves and nursing cap. I even remember it was a cold night in the middle of the winter. Fortunately, we made it back home without incident.

Knowing that I had to report to Sister Pat, a no nonsense person, the next morning, I kept rehearsing the incident in my mind all night, wondering if I ever could survive the inquisition. Much to my surprise Sister Pat was just amused. Her only comment was, "We all know Jack Kelly; he is one of our frequent customers. Jack is a fine man but he has that little weakness for alcohol, just like all the Irish." Without further comment, Sister Pat headed off down the hall to Sister Mary Brendan's office, who was the hospital administrator at the time.

For many years after at homecoming and class reunions, this story was a centerpiece of the conversation, always gaining momentum with each telling. Incidentally, some years later, Jack Kelly died and is buried in St. Matthew's Catholic Cemetery in Monroe.

While clearly stating that she is not a historian, Sister Eileen is convinced that there is a definite need to "tell our stories, humorous or otherwise. The history of those early days, passed down by word of mouth by nurses and Sisters who knew, admired, respected and worked with both Sister Patrick and Sister Liguori, during their long active careers as nursing supervisors is

precious.” Sister Eileen has a ready repertoire of these stories.