



Collaboration

Sisters of Providence, Mother Joseph Province

Responding to the Needs of the Day

For the 105 Sisters of Providence in Mother Joseph Province, the coronavirus pandemic has given the sisters an imposed contemplative period, become a catalyst for rapid change, and challenged them to connect in creative and compassionate ways for community, spirituality and ministry.

Under the thoughtful guidance of the new Leadership Team – only a few months into their term – the sisters are rising to the occasion within strict physical boundaries and public health requirements. Because the Provincial Administration Office and many sisters of Mother

Joseph Province are located in the Seattle area – an early epicenter of the virus – life as they knew it was upended in early March. The Leadership Team moved quickly to ensure rigorous health and safety measures were in place for the most vulnerable sisters and caregivers at the Sisters of Providence retirement facilities in Seattle and Spokane.

It was quite a change from retired life as usual. Health checks of sisters and staff were conducted daily, visitors were no longer permitted, chapels were closed, TVs delivered Mass, dining services were adjusted to minimize contact, and activities were restructured so sisters spending more time in isolation could enjoy some community time, though at least six feet apart.

As the pandemic swept through the world, more changes swept through the province. On March 12, Provincial Administration staff began their work-from-home routine. By late March, sisters throughout Washington, Oregon, California, El Salvador and the Philippines were under strict stay-at-home orders as well. All were adapting to the new realities as best as possible during what will be remembered as a Lent, Holy Week and Easter season unlike any they have ever experienced.

Sisters turned to laptops, tablets and mobile phones for connection – even some of the most technologically timid gave it a try. Tools like Zoom, Teams, FaceTime, Skype and WhatsApp became indispensable for facilitating continued community, ministry, spirituality, leadership and support in Mother Joseph Province.

Though their usual modes of engaging were reset, the sisters in Mother Joseph Province have a long history of “responding to the needs of the day,” inspired by foundress Emilie Tavernier Gamelin of Montreal. Blessed Emilie and later Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, who brought the congregation to the western U.S., spent a lifetime modeling this in their service to the poor and vulnerable – and bearing witness to how Providence provides in even the most desperate situations.



Sister Felma sews masks for sisters, staff and caregivers.

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It is fitting that the sisters appealed to Blessed Emilee to halt and heal the coronavirus in a novena prayer. They continue special prayers each day – together but apart – for the well-being of the health care providers and other essential workers on the front lines.

In this same spirit, sisters are approaching the challenges of the pandemic with innovation and generosity in their ministries. Sisters are continuing to offer counseling sessions, tutoring and ESL instruction on-line; preparing sandwiches for the homeless; hosting remote prayer groups; making wellness-check calls; delivering supplies to struggling families; ministering as hospital chaplains to COVID-19 patients and their families, and sewing lots of masks.

Fortunately, there has been only one known case of COVID-19 confirmed in the congregation, and the sister recovered in quarantine in her home. Once again, Providence provides.

“We continue to experience the need and the power of prayer for all those who have contracted the COVID-19 virus as well as the many heroes we are privileged to see daily on the news caring for the sick,” said Provincial Leader Barbara Schamber, SP. “It is hard, at times, not to be able to reach out and tell each one that we are praying for their safety and return to good health. The reality is that many continue to die, even with the finest health care. We can pray for those who are caregivers, those who are sick, those without a paycheck to support their families, and for an end to this pandemic.”



Sisters Marcia Gatica and Marita Capili deliver supplies to struggling families in El Salvador.



Retired sisters prepare sandwiches for homeless individuals while practicing social distancing.



Sister Joan Gallagher checks in on other sisters.



Sister Paula Cosko teaches her ESL class online.