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Novitiate House *Unveiling!*

On May 4, 2024, we gathered together at our Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to give thanks for all who helped make the building of our Novitiate House a reality and to bless the House in preparation for all who will live in it. What better way to give thanks than by celebrating the Holy Eucharist? The Most Reverend Michael G. Duca, Bishop of Baton Rouge, presided, and present were concelebrating priests and deacons from the Dioceses of Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Cleveland. We are beyond blessed to have gathered for this historic moment with friends, family, The Sister Dulce Foundation Inc. Board Members, benefactors, and members of the local community.

“I have come to set the world on fire.”

Luke 12:49

In addition to our Sisters in Baton Rouge, Gainesville, and Cleveland attending the celebration, our Superior General, Mother María Luisa Mendoza Grande, HMSS, and Secretary General, Mother Josefina Martínez Gastón, HMSS, were present from Mexico.

A reception, with refreshments provided by Chef John Folse and served by our Prayer Partners, followed the Mass in the Dolphin Room of our Ministry Center. Meanwhile, Bishop Duca blessed the Novitiate House, accompanied by clergy, Board Members, and our Sisters. Part of the ritual to bless the Formation House included a procession through the building during which Bishop Duca sprinkled each room with holy water.

To process through the halls of our new House of Formation, witnessing the Bishop bless each room with holy water, was indeed witnessing God's promises being fulfilled.

After years of prayer and the outpouring of so many people's generosity, we were so excited to share with everyone the soon-to-be home where young women within the United States will be formed in our Eucharistic-Mercedarian charism and be sent to set the world on fire with Eucharistic love.

After the blessing, the open house began; this Unveiling of the Novitiate House was a unique occasion to welcome friends, family, benefactors, and community members to see where the formation of our Postulants and Novices will take place. From the Chapel, community room, and library to the refectory, where our Sisters will share countless meals, our Novitiate House, above being a physical house, is meant to be a spiritual home where our Sisters can learn to follow Christ more closely.

Over the past year, we have witnessed the transformation of this building - from the excitement of its interior walls going up, to electricity being installed, to the walls being painted and furniture being moved in, to more recently, the stained glass windows and the altar being set. There has constantly been something new to see and we have appreciated all the hands of Deumite Construction, under the leadership of Scott Deumite and the supervision of Mike Bottomlee, that have helped to make the vision of Jairo León, our architect, and Papa a reality.

We still await our move-in that will happen this summer, after inspections and final touches of the building are completed. Preparing for the Novitiate House Unveiling was a sweet foretaste of that day's arrival!

We humbly ask for you to continue praying for our Sisters in Formation and their Formators who will be moving into our Novitiate House soon.

We thank all of you who have been part of this building process and invite you to continue being involved with our House of Formation either through your spiritual support, financial support in helping us with the remaining Building Fund debt, or by participating in one of our Work Days this upcoming academic year!

Building Cost: \$5,200,000

Amount Raised: \$4,000,000

Still Need: \$1,200,000



Donations:

- 17560 George O'Neal Rd
Baton Rouge, LA 70817
- (225) 752-8480
- [mercedariansisters.org/
novitiate-house-building-fund/](http://mercedariansisters.org/novitiate-house-building-fund/)



Photos by Kleinpeter Photography and Nicole Jones

HMSS Regional Announcements

On May 4, 2024, Mother María Luisa Mendoza Grande, HMSS, our Superior General, and Mother Mary Rosario Vega, HMSS, our Regional Superior, in the presence of many Sisters in our United States Immaculate Conception Region, announced changes effective this Summer in our Region:

The first is the movement of our Regional House from our convent in San Antonio, Texas, to our convent in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Our Regional Archives have also been relocated. Mother General read a decree from Bishop Michael G. Duca formally establishing our Novitiate House on our Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center property in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

After 39 years of service in the Diocese of San Diego, our convent in Lemon Grove, California will be closing due to the need to reinforce our other communities. We are so thankful for all the love and support of the people in the Diocese!

This August, we will be opening a convent in Maumee, Ohio. Please pray for the three Sisters who will be founding this community in the Diocese of Toledo!

Updates will be shared on our website this Fall!



Perpetual Profession of Vows

Q&A

On Wednesday, April 3, 2024,
Sr. Tonia of the Heart of Jesus Borsellino, HMSS, and
Sr. Raquel of the Holy Spirit Gutiérrez, HMSS,
professed their Final Vows at
St. Augustine Catholic Church in Gainesville, Florida.

Both Sisters were asked to share about their
experience of the day.

Q: Sr. Raquel of the Holy Spirit, what was your favorite part of the ceremony?

One perduring grace I'm thankful for from the Mass of my Perpetual Vows is remembering the blessings I received through the prayer of consecration that Bishop Erik Pohlmeier prayed over us, a prayer granted from the Church. Some of my favorite parts of the prayer of consecration were: "...Send the fire of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of your daughters to keep alive within them the holy desire he has given them." And, "Lord, holy Father, guide the steps of your servants and guard them on their pilgrimage through life. When they come at last to the throne of Christ the King, may they not fear him as their judge, but hear the voice of their Bridegroom lovingly inviting them to the wedding feast of heaven." I'm thankful to the Church for her blessing over my vocation and trust that the grace will sustain me in my vocation throughout my life and carry me even after death, when I'm united with my Spouse eternally.

Q: Sr. Raquel of the Holy Spirit, which Saints did you choose to add to the Litany of Saints?

~**Saint Juan Diego** - Being that my parents were born in Mexico, Juan Diego along with the apparition of our Lady of Guadalupe are deeply rooted in my identity. That God would gift us with this revelation of His Mother in this particular way in Mexico is amazing to me. I love the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego and I love to study and contemplate this revelation and the unending symbolism of her image, words, gestures, healing and encouragement that she gives us as a tender Mother who tells us: "Am I not here who am your mother?"

~**Blessed Concepción Cabrera de Armida** - A Mexican mystic who had a strong devotion to adoring Our Lord in His Eucharistic Presence and was given a special mission by Jesus to pray, intercede, and sacrifice for the sanctification of priests. She founded the Religious Sisters of the Cross of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Modesto, California, which is the area I am from. These contemplative sisters, devoted to Perpetual Adoration, prayed for me and spiritually accompanied me while I was discerning my vocation.

~**St. José Luis Sánchez del Río** - For his heroic virtue during the Cristero War in Mexico. Determined not to renounce his faith during intense persecution, the government troops skinned the bottom of his feet and forced him to walk. During this walk, he prayed the rosary and sang songs to Our Lady of Guadalupe. At the age of 14, he was martyred after shouting, "¡Viva Cristo Rey y Santa María de Guadalupe!"

I also chose: Saint John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Frances of Rome, St. Louis de Montfort, Blessed Solanus Casey, and Blessed Carlo Acutis.

Q: Sr. Heart of Jesus, how was your experience of Final Vows different from First Vows?

My experience of Final Profession was very different than First Profession. It was like St. Peter before and after the Resurrection. At First Vows, I had a zeal and excitement in giving my yes to the Lord. Not to be corny, but it was like the excitement of young love. My yes to the Lord was new, but also immature. Final Vows was very different. Like St. Peter after denying Jesus, I had a greater awareness of the weight of this call, my own poverty, and the experience of trials that caused my heart to be humbled. But once more, the Lord was asking me to respond to His love just like He did with St. Peter after His Resurrection. This time, Peter's yes was totally dependent upon the Lord and not on his own strength. Similarly, Jesus' love brought me to deeper levels of faith, surrender, maturity, and love in approaching Final Vows, so that I could truly be a spouse leaning upon her Beloved. The Lord's love is incredible like that and in His Providence, He brought me to a total surrender, when I was being called to give my life to Him forever.

Q: Sr. Heart of Jesus, what was your favorite part of the ceremony?

It's really difficult to choose a favorite part of the Ceremony, but I keep going back to what I experienced after the Profession Rite. The grace is still so vivid and I'm still in awe of it. I remember just sitting in my pew and soaking everything in with an attention to the present moment that I had not had in a very long time, maybe ever. I was experiencing everything with such peace and freedom in my heart. I was radically present and felt so at rest in myself and in the Lord. I don't know how to describe it other than being fully alive, whole, and resting in the truth that this is what the Lord always wanted for me. Trusting Him, entrusting Him with my whole life in complete surrender, forever, really gave me Life. Now I see how Pope Saint John Paul II's words are so true: "Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."



From a Mother's Perspective

One of the greatest blessings I have received in religious life is to be able to accompany young girls discerning their God-given vocation. I serve them by walking with them, as I participate in their joys and struggles. As time passes, I see them growing in their love and trust of Jesus, maturing in their decision to make Jesus the center and only Love of their lives. I see them grow in all aspects of life: prayer life, fraternal life, apostolic life... My heart just gets inflamed as I think of each one of them and entrust them to Papa to make each one of them the saint they were created to be.

Each one is so unique, so beautiful!

Each of the Masses of Perpetual Profession of Vows has filled my human heart with so much joy! Especially when I witness the Sisters lay prostrated, signifying their total surrender to the One whom they have discovered and experienced **loves them** from eternity and for eternity. As I hear the prayer of consecration by the bishop on behalf of our holy Mother Church, and as they receive the bridal crown of roses and the ring, I feel my heart is about to explode with emotion, and joy surges from the deepest part of my being.

They are truly my daughters; I love each one of them so very much and so distinctively. I have no words to thank God for giving me the opportunity to serve Him and my community in such a sweet obedience.

~Mother Jeanette Marie Estrada, HMSS

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Like the Dew



*A pilgrimage is different than a vacation or sight-seeing adventure. The main purpose of a pilgrimage is to travel to encounter God in the places He has shown Himself.
It is a reminder that our life is a pilgrimage to Heaven, our hoped-for final destination.*



What drew you to Medjugorje and with whom did you go?

I have always been intrigued about the Marian apparition at Medjugorje. I have read several books about the apparitions. However, I never dreamed of going, since it is not a trip that we budget for in our communities. But then, the invitation came from Fr. Josh Johnson to me and two other Sisters! Of course, my heart was full of joy and expectation at being at the place of the apparitions and then at the possibility of being present at one of the apparitions!

What graces flowed from your time there?

A greater love for Momma Mary. It is like the experience of a little child who got "quality time with mom."

What surprised you during the pilgrimage?

I just can't believe that I got to chat with Marija, one of the visionaries. [Mother Isabel also commented that the peace of the place impacted her.]

What has been a grace that has stuck with you?

My most precious memory is of Fr. Josh guiding me one morning to the Adoration Chapel which I was having difficulty finding and telling me: "There is your bridegroom." It was a reaffirmation of my vocation as a bride of Christ. Of course, I know Jesus loves me, and of course, I know that I am His bride, but when events like this happen, especially coming from a priest who is "alter Christus", it is like Jesus claiming me one more time as His own in a very intimate way. Oh! those moments spent with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in that land of Mary...

Why is Our Lady important for a Mercedarian Sister of the Blessed Sacrament?

She is our model. She teaches us how to carry Jesus within ourselves, how to be detached to the point of giving away our life for others, within our many limitations. Above all, she teaches us how to be Jesus' brides. She mothers us, nourishes, and guides us in our journey to Heaven, to union with Jesus, with the Holy Trinity.

Medjugorje

In June 2023, three of our Superiors traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mother Rosario Vega, Mother Jeanette Marie, and Mother Isabel, were invited to go on pilgrimage with parishioners of Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church to sites where Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has appeared for decades to a small number of visionaries.

Here is a brief interview with Mother Jeanette Marie, HMSS.





In January 2024, Five of our Perpetually Professed Sisters went on pilgrimage with Fr. Kevin Fox to Italy in celebration of their Final Vows. Sr. Chiara, Sr. Trinity, Sr. Josefina, Sr. Yve Marie, and Sr. Eucharist spent 10 days traveling and praying around Rome and Assisi.



The Lord allowed the Sisters to run into many friends of the community throughout their pilgrimage, including Deacon Bobby Vogel at St. Clement Basilica.



St. Peter's Basilica outside and inside. Pictured above are our Sisters with Fr. Fox.

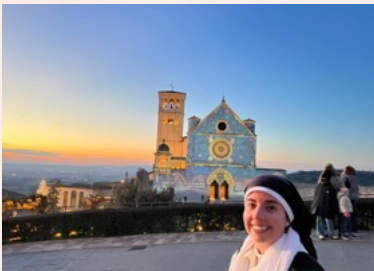
Italy



The Scala Sancta, or the Holy Stairs, believed to be the ones Jesus climbed on His way to be condemned.



Our USA Sisters visited our Italian Sisters at their convent.



(Above) Sr. Chiara is all smiles at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi! (Below) The Sisters also prayed in the convent of St. Clare in Assisi.



A little fun was also to be had, including a saintly photo-bomber, St. Paul, at St. Paul Outside the Walls!



Prayer never ceases! Here are our Sisters praying the Divine Office between holy sites.



Church where Blessed Carlo Acutis, one of the great Eucharistic Saints, is buried!



Statue of St. Peter Nolasco, Founder of the Mercedarian Friars, in the Vatican.

Sr. Josefina shares graces of her experience:

I was incredibly impacted by people in Rome. Every time we went to the resting place of someone I look up to - usually, canonized Saints, but also people whom I believe are in heaven but are uncanonized- it was like sitting, standing, or kneeling beside a superhero. Heroes are real - spiritual gifts are real - and I was blessed to be in a position in which I could be easily disposed to talking to these amazing people who have preceded me in Heavenly Glory, and recognizing their presence with me through Holy Spirit.

Upon learning that I was being offered a trip to Rome, I had a distinct understanding that what I was going to receive, I was meant to pass on. I went without much understanding besides that, and asked the Lord to help me absorb and integrate everything I was called to for the sake of passing on our faith with a deeper connection with, awareness of, and appreciation for the holy sites that I was going to experience. I have been able to share some of the fruits of the trip with my community, friends of our community, administrators at the school, my spiritual children, and my family members. We, as the First Letter of St. Peter says, must always be prepared to testify to the hope that we have by faith (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). Please pray that I may continue to respond well to Jesus' request as He gives it to Peter, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15).

Other holy sites visited:

- In Rome:**
 The Sistine Chapel
 St. Ignatius of Loyola Church
 The Church of the Gesù
 St. John the Baptist Church
 Pantheon
 Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme
 Chiesa Nuova / Church of the Oratory
 Scavi Tour at St. Peter's Basilica
 Church of St. Agnes in Agony
 Basilica of St. Cecilia
 Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere

- In Assisi:**
 Basilica of St. Clare
 Basilica of St. Francis
 Convent of San Damiano

Over the 2023-2024 academic year, we were blessed to host two full Come & See retreats at our Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center in Baton Rouge, LA. The purpose of these retreats is to provide an environment of encounter for young women open to discerning religious life with our Institute. We hope to help dispel the fear of discerning religious life and provide clarity for those open to discerning religious life through opportunities like these discernment retreats.

Here is some feedback from retreatants this year:

"Going and being with the sisters helped me to answer questions. There are many details of the way each family or community lives that I wouldn't even think to ask about, but would affect me daily for the rest of my life; I was only able to see these things by praying, working, studying, and playing with the sisters. It's easy to have a picture in your head of what you think it may be like, but you can't discern an idea. To discern you have to be discerning a real possibility, and so visiting allowed me to bring a real experience to prayer. I could imagine myself joyfully living with the sisters in the future because that is what I experienced on my visit!" -Anna

COME & FOLLOW ME

Recapping our Come & See Retreats

"During the retreat, I had a profound encounter with God during the Eucharistic procession. As I knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, I felt enveloped in God's love for me and sensed His desire for me to know His will and His goodness. Through attentive listening to the Lord and absorbing the wisdom shared by the sisters, I received great clarity in my discernment." -Laurie

"So as I arrived, there was a lady who had asked to take pictures with Sr. Refugio and Sr. Chiara. Their warm and silly response made me feel safe like I could be myself. So they opened up to me about their discernment as soon as we got in the car (I asked them deep questions right from the start)...If you are wondering whether or not to come, I say, be bold, be brave, and 'Come & Follow Me.' You will never know if God is calling you to Himself if you never give Him the chance to pursue you." -Araceli

Please join us in praying for people to courageously respond to the vocation God has given them! If you, or someone you know, might benefit from our discernment retreats, please do not hesitate to reach out to our Vocations Team through our website. We look forward to hearing from you.

CONFERENCES WITH MR. FOULKES

From December 27-31, 2023, we had the privilege of hosting Mr. George Foulkes, the Historian of our Institute and the Postulator for the Cause of Canonization for our Mother Foundress, Venerable María del Refugio.

While he was with us, Mr. Foulkes gave six conferences covering the process of canonization, the life and spirituality of our Mother Foundress, and the history of our Institute. One of those conferences was open to the public, which you can now watch on our YouTube Channel, and was followed by a Night of Adoration.

It was amazing to hear how the Lord has worked throughout the history of our Institute, from the ways that He first connected Maria del Refugio with the people who would help her start our Institute, to how He guided her and our Institute through times of persecution, all the way to Mr. Foulkes' incredible stories of how Divine Providence has led him to the people and documents he needed for Mother Foundress' Cause of Canonization.

It was such a gift to spend a few days getting to know Mother Foundress and our Institute's history better, and I look forward to future conferences with Mr. Foulkes! -Sr. Amanda Hartwell, First-Year Novice



Mother Foundress Spotlight

"In the shade of the Tabernacle, you will lack nothing." With these words, our Mother Foundress, Venerable Maria del Refugio, expressed her profound confidence in the love and providence of her Beloved Eucharistic Jesus, which carried her through the many trials of her life. With these words she also invites us to entrust ourselves wholly to Jesus in the Eucharist and find in Him our joy and our security.

MARCH 4 LIFE:

An Experience of Fraternal Love

This January, ten of our Sisters had the gift of serving on a pilgrimage to the March for Life with 400 teens and adults from the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Not only was it an amazing experience to serve the teens and witness them growing in their faith, but it was also an experience of fraternity for our Sisters. At every stop during the 24-hour bus ride, our Sisters would immediately find each other from other buses and check in to make sure everyone was doing okay and had what they needed. It was like our Sisters hadn't seen each other in days, and their joy was seen by those around them.

Praying together for the first time after the bus ride was like a breath of fresh air for them and they all knew it was the prayers from our Sisters back at home that were keeping them going. It was amazing to see the power of fraternal love and the witness it created for those around them!





More photos from our Come and See Retreat
& March for Life Pilgrimage!



Save the Date!

*The following events will take place this Fall and we would love for you to attend!
More information will be posted this August on our website under 'Upcoming Events'.*

Nights of Adoration

September 19 & October 24
6-8pm
Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center
Baton Rouge, LA

Discernment Retreat

October 25-27
Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center
Baton Rouge, LA
*Please contact sisterjeanette@mercedariansisters.org
before making plans to attend.*

Fall Work Day

November 9
Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center
Baton Rouge, LA



Connect With Us!

MercedarianSisters.org



Vocational Inquiries

[MercedarianSisters.org/
inquiry-form/](http://MercedarianSisters.org/inquiry-form/)



*Our Lady of Mercy,
pray for us!*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Summer

Sisters will be attending Summer Camps in the following places throughout June:

- Catholic Youth Summer Camp (Centerburg, Ohio)
- Life Teen Camp Covecrest (Tiger, Georgia)
- Life Teen Camp Hidden Lake (Dahlonega, Georgia)
- The Franciscan Experience (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)
- Camp Chatawa (Chatawa, Mississippi)

July 10-28 Superiors attend XVIII General Chapter in Mexico

July 17-21 National Eucharistic Congress

August

- 7 Entrance to Postulancy
- 15 First Profession
- 22 Entrance to Novitiate