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## The Lover of our soul is our Hope

V.J.E.

*Viva Jesús Eucarístico.* As Mercedarian Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, we translate this phrase as *Praised be Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.* It is not a translation that really gives us the complete meaning of this salutation that we use for headings in letters or to greet each other in our daily encounters, but it is the best way to worship our Lord. It is the first thought that reminds us that our hope is in Him, our beloved Jesus in the Eucharist, because by His Salvation, by His presence in the Blessed Sacrament, we have everything that we are gazing for in this life and in eternity.

"I have come to set the world on fire."

*Luke 12:49*

Our hope in prosperity and difficulties is in Him. Throughout these last years in our U.S. Region of the Immaculate Conception, we have lived with great joy the fulfillment of God's promises through the blessing of beautiful vocations who seek holiness in the fire of the Eucharistic love. In this Jubilee of Hope, I am excited and rejoice in the hope of the present, and the future, that has its foundations in the promises of our Lord.

I am very grateful for Mother Rosario Vega, HMSS, and Mother Jeanette Marie Estrada, HMSS, for opening their souls to the guidance of the Holy Spirit thirteen years ago. With hope, discernment, the strength of prayer, fasting, and sacrifices, they looked back at the foundation of our Institute and radically changed their lifestyle towards God. In surrendering their lives to God, and not only their lives but those of our beautiful Region, God in His infinite mercy turned His face upon us. Since then, we have received many blessings in each vocation that God has given us. In this hope, we need to always remember that we have our beloved Mother of Mercy as an intercessor and we also have the precious witness of our Mother Foundress, Venerable María del Refugio Aguilar, who trusted completely in the fulfillment of God's love through her Institute.

Personally, I am very thankful to our beloved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to be part of this Region. I am thankful to be renewed in spirit and in my vocation for the almost 14 years that I have been part of the Region of the Immaculate Conception. I am very rich as I am seeing the love of the Father filling our hands with hope every day and showing us how to keep growing in His love.

## 115th Anniversary

At the time of the foundation of our Institute in 1910, our Mother Foundress lived as the apostle Paul encourages us to in Romans 12:12, to "rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer." Venerable Maria del Refugio Aguilar without a doubt lived in that hope in the midst of the religious persecution in Mexico, always trusting in God's mercy. The situation was not easy for anyone, but especially for a new religious community. Her Eucharistic love trespassed all the uncertainty she faced.

Today, we, the daughters of Maria del Refugio, can see that Eucharistic love has blessed us for 115 years. We have received a treasure that keeps us looking forward to a present and future in which we see His unconditional love in everything, but especially in our families and in people who love us and remain close to us as benefactors who, with their spiritual and material gifts, share our charism. May Eucharistic love be the fire of our Lord's presence in this world.

*To Evangelize with Mary in the light of the Eucharist,*

**Mother Maria Isabel Rodriguez, HMSS**

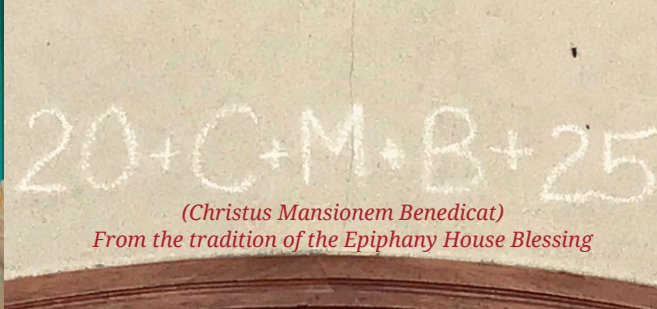
*Regional Superior*







May 4, 2024  
Bishop Duca blessed  
the Novitiate House



(Christus Mansionem Benedicat)  
From the tradition of the Epiphany House Blessing



February 24, 2025  
Mass was celebrated in the  
Novitiate House for the first time as  
the Chapel of Divine Providence  
was repainted

## One year since our Novitiate House Unveiling!

For our Sisters in Formation, this first year of living in the Novitiate House has been filled with many exciting moments: spending countless hours in Adoration before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, celebrating Mass in the House's Chapel for the first time, decorating for Christmas, sharing many meals and laughs with one another in the refectory (dining room), hosting many wonderful guests, and truly finding themselves at home.



**Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, former Chancellor for the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences, visited our new Novitiate House while in Baton Rouge to see "the miracle of American vocations," when he so often hears in Rome of the vocations crisis in the United States.**



**The Novitiate's spaciousness, compared to our other convents, allows it to fulfill Mother Foundress' vision of a "gran casa de familia," where our Sisters can easily gather together.**

"It has been such a blessing to have this space to grow in community. As a Formation House, we have recreation, eat, exercise, and pray together in a place that is all our own. **It feels like a family home**, filled with joy and memories. There was one Saturday when Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, from the Vatican, paid us a surprise visit. All of our sisters gathered on the floor in the front entryway to greet him and listen to his stories from Rome! Again, it is a gift to be able to have this space to grow in communion with others."

-Sr. Katie Krantz, Second Year Novice



**The Sisters show Monsignor Robert H. Berggreen, during his first visit to the Novitiate House, the new heights they can reach on the library ladders!**



"As I was discerning which community to enter with, **I had the sense that the Lord was building a house for me**, and when I came to visit, I laughed because there was literally a house being built! Living here has been a beautiful experience of community, and I think that it's reaffirmed this sense of being at home from the Lord. My favorite spots in the house are the Chapel (because JESUS lives with us!) and the library because it's a beautiful spot to pray and look out at the beautiful scenery on our property." -Carly Bosse, Postulant



Though the Novitiate House is fully constructed, there remains \$1.2 Million of the Building Fund cost that needs to be paid. We ask that you prayerfully consider making a financial donation that would benefit the future of our Institute!



- 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/)



# March for Life Recap



Fifteen of our Sisters attended the March for Life in Washington D.C. this past January, journeying with the St. Michael the Archangel Catholic High School pilgrimage group from the Diocese of Baton Rouge and the Catholic Gators Campus Ministry group from the University of Florida.

Thirteen Sisters made the week-long pilgrimage, sometimes sleeping on the bus that drove through the night to get from Louisiana to Washington D.C. Our Sisters accompanied nearly 300 teens as spiritual mothers by journeying with them, praying with them, and giving talks or reflections.

The nights were spent at a campsite where there were various speakers, activities, and times of prayer for the students to encounter the Lord and prepare their hearts for the day of the March. Our Sisters were able to lead praise and worship and encourage the teens through intercessory prayer during Eucharistic Adoration. This is one of the most privileged roles of being spiritual mothers, and it is a great joy to hold so many hearts before our Eucharistic Lord.

The day of the March for Life was truly one that celebrated life!

The massive group of white hats could be spotted miles away line-dancing, singing, and praying as they walked the route to the Capitol Building.

All our Sisters attending the March for Life were even able to meet up during the March!

The trip was a memorable experience for each of the Sisters who attended, and one they will forever be grateful for.





# Discernment Retreats

## Spring 2025

### Cleveland, OH

#### Discernment Day - February 1

-Sr. April Marie Josefina Candelaria, HMSS, Assistant Vocation Director

"The day began with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in our parish church at 8:15 a.m. After Mass, we accompanied eleven young women and three sets of parents to the adjacent school. Four LEM (Mercedarian Laity of the Blessed Sacrament) members helped with all three meals that were served that day. They are phenomenal! After getting to meet the other young women and our Sisters, the parents spent some time in prayer with our Eucharistic Lord before departing for the day. The day was filled with talks, question and answer sessions, the Liturgy of the Hours, a Rosary walk, Lectio Divina, hours of silent Adoration, and opportunities to meet one-on-one with a Sister. It was a blessed gathering. The young women really enjoyed their experience with the Sisters of our Institute and were deeply touched by the Lord. We are so happy and honored to be vessels of the Holy Spirit in this way, helping women to encounter Papa's love and pray about whether or not this way of life may be the way in which He has designed their hearts to give and receive love fully, faithfully and fruitfully on this side of heaven. We look forward to witnessing what Jesus will do during and after our next Discernment Day!"



### Baton Rouge, LA

#### Discernment Retreat - March 21-23

-Sr. Elizabeth Jasek, First Year Novice

"Eight young women attended from several states. Over the three days, the focus of the weekend retreat was finding and following the Lord's peace. Through talks from professed sisters, novices, and postulants, discerners were invited to reflect on the journey of discernment not only for in a state-of-life vocation, but in the daily pursuit of God's Will. Bishop Michael G. Duca of the Diocese of Baton Rouge celebrated Mass on the Saturday of the retreat and briefly visited with the women during breakfast. The weekend coincided with Jeff Cavins' annual conferences at the Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center. Discerners heard Jeff speak about how being rooted in the Word of God protects us from the agitation of the Evil One. Through much time for Eucharistic Adoration, Confession, receiving prayer from Sisters, and praise and worship, the retreatants could encounter Jesus, be refreshed in His peace, and listen to His next call for them. Through sharing meals and conversations, crafts, and meeting with our Superiors, the young women saw our community's charism, family spirit, and way of life."

### Gainesville, FL

#### Discernment Day - March 1

Women from around Florida attended a day retreat with the Sisters who serve in Campus Ministry at the University of Florida!



### Upcoming Retreats!

Visit our Vocations Team page  
on our website:

[https://mercedariansisters.org/  
inquiry-form/](https://mercedariansisters.org/inquiry-form/)

Dates for discernment  
opportunities in the Fall are  
forthcoming!





# Memorable Moments from this Semester



**National Vocation Summit 2025**  
**Legionaries of Christ Seminary in**  
**Cheshire, CT**

Mother Rosario Vega, HMSS, was a panelist!

## **Bible Marathon** **Gainesville, FL**

Proclaiming the Word of God for the University of Florida across the street from campus in front of St. Augustine Catholic Church and Student Center.



**College Women's Retreat**

After hosting a weekend retreat for more than fifty high school girls in February, our Sisters in Baton Rouge were inspired to host a day retreat for college-age women in March.



**Beloved Retreat for High School Girls**  
**Camp Abbey, Louisiana**



## **SEEK25**

### **Salt Lake City, UT**

Five of our Sisters tabled at the annual SEEK Conference with more than 20,000 people, primarily college students.



## **Diaconate Ordination** **Cincinnati, OH**

Our Cleveland and Maumee Sisters attended the diaconate ordination of Sr. Elizabeth's father and brother!



## **Cleveland, OH**

Our Sisters organized the faculty retreat at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School, where many of them serve.



## **Congrats, Madre Isa and Allie!**

After two years of training, one of our convent dogs, Allie, passed her therapy dog certification test!



# INSIGHTS FROM THE JUNIORS

We asked our Temporary Professed Sisters about graces they have experienced since their First Profession of Vows. Here are some of the graces they shared!

*"Put flesh to fire!" (Pope Francis)*

*In reflecting on my time in Temporary Vows, this quote says it all. It has been a treasure to walk with Jesus as His Bride and learn to receive the fire of His love in the Eucharist and His Word. In receiving His great love for me, I have begun to understand how He is calling me to put flesh to this reality in community, the school we serve, the trials, the joys, the many travels and adventures, and the relationships He puts in my life. Since August 13, 2023, I have asked Jesus, "to give me the grace to be receptive to being perfected in the fire of Eucharistic love" and to help me put flesh to this reality He calls me into each moment.*

*Sr. Katherine Joseph Marie Allensworth, HMSS  
Professed First Vows in 2023*



*Since my First Profession of Vows in August 2023, the Lord has consistently revealed the importance of complete and utter surrender to each moment that HE has willed for me. Each season is a new opportunity to grow in love of Him and in the particular calling that He has placed on my life, like the unfolding of the meaning of my religious name. What a beautiful, deep, often difficult, but fruitful mystery that the Lord has allowed us to be a part of!  
Heaven must always be the goal!*

*Sr. Chelsea of the Heart of Mary Parza, HMSS  
Professed First Vows in 2023*

*The liturgy of the Eucharist stood out to me most vividly during the Mass of First Profession. As the Bishop pronounced the words of consecration, I experienced more deeply the reality of Jesus' free and total gift of Himself to me, as I was in that moment, with all of my weakness and frailty. The graces of that day continue to be brought forth daily in my participation at Mass where, amidst the joys and struggles of my transition to life as a Professed Sister, I am reminded that my ability to live this way of life doesn't have much to do with my capabilities or successes, but is only possible because of His first Love.*

*Sr. Audra Magdalene Marie Hoffmeister, HMSS  
Professed First Vows in 2024*



*[Spending time with our Sisters in San Antonio] felt insightful, especially with hearing all the stories and learning more of our history. We would sing traditional and community songs that I have never heard before and spent many enjoyable times together.*

*Sr. Ashin Anastasia Kalladanthiyil, HMSS  
Professed First Vows in 2024*



# Veni Creator Spiritus



## The Well

*Song by Sr. Sara Cecilia Ferreira, HMSS*

I'll meet you at the well  
We can meet in our tiredness  
Our thirstiness

I'll meet you at the well  
I'll reveal my heart to you  
Will you reveal yours too?

Will you meet me at the well? (x2)

I'll meet you at the well  
I promise you can leave everything  
I'll wash it clean

I'll meet you at the well  
We'll drink deeply from our hearts and sing  
Of God's mercy

Will you meet me at the well? (x4)

[Bridge 2x]

I thirst for a drink from your heart  
I desire to show you who's you really are  
To wrap you in love  
And let you rest in my arms

Will you meet me at the well (x4)

I'll be waiting at the well  
It'll be just you and me  
I'll tell you everything

I'll be waiting at the well  
Be not afraid  
Come and drink from me  
Are you ready?  
Will you meet me at the well?

**Come, Creator Spirit!**

**We pray you enjoy some of the creative  
fruits of our prayer this year!**

## With You Always

*Poem by Sr. April Marie Josefina Candelaria, HMSS*

He passed through the midst of them  
And he went away  
Had he really been here?  
Why couldn't he stay?  
A whisper of kindness  
A smile of peace  
Eyes filled with knowledge  
Presence to put at ease  
Hands held out to bless  
Arms outstretched  
Ready to take up the cross  
Even in its unloveliness  
No, I know that you were here  
I am marked by your love  
Your memory won't disappear  
We're meant to remember some  
So, even if I can't see you  
I will hold onto hope  
And smile at you in Jesus  
Where we find our true home  
Yes, you may be far away  
But prayers are beyond all space  
So, I'll remember you in grace  
Until we see Him Face-to-Face



*Wood Carvings by Sr.  
Lourdes of the Holy  
Eucharist Rebecca  
Furnells, HMSS*



*Card made by Sr. Katherine Joseph Marie  
Allensworth, HMSS*



*Fox made by Sr. Monica Hope  
Mercedes Waters, HMSS*

## The Well

*An excerpt from a poem by Sr. Alaina Furman*

When Messiah comes, He will tell us everything."  
..."I am He – the One speaking with you."  
I stop mid-turn, return stare for stare –  
His eyes lay bare my very soul.  
He sees the shadows, knows the scars untold –  
knows every shame, every name in my past from first to last.  
He sees it all, knows it all – sees me, knows me –  
yet here He stays, hasn't judged, hasn't run...  
He told me everything I've ever done –  
could He really be the One?





# Kitchen Creations

Following in the steps of our Mother Foundress,  
many of our Sisters love to make bread  
(and other treats) for the community.  
There are a lot of memories made in our kitchens!





# LEM

## Mercedarian Laity of the Blessed Sacrament

*Laicos Eucarísticos Mercedarios (LEM), translated as Mercedarian Laity of the Blessed Sacrament, is an ecclesial movement based on our Mercedarian-Eucharistic Charism that welcomes lay people, single or married, to participate in our spiritual experience in communion with the Church.*

As Mercedarian Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, we are so thankful to God for the gift of our charism and spirituality given to us by the Holy Spirit, through His instrument, our Mother Foundress, Venerable María del Refugio. As with any gift that God gives us, it is meant to be shared. We are happy to be able to form others in prayer and the spiritual life according to our charism and spirituality. Since 2022, we have been forming groups of lay people each year in a process of discernment and formation, strengthening them in their spiritual life. Those who started in 2022 are in discernment to make promises soon, to live a life in light of our charism. During Advent 2024, we had five people in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (two are not pictured) receiving the Our Lady of Mercy Scapular and entering Postulancy, and one person in Gainesville, Florida. Some of the members have shared that since they have been a part of this formation, they have grown in their prayer life. Formation classes include two monthly meetings via Zoom, which allows people in distant places to partake. One of our members who is in her first year, Joni Russo, shared the following,

*"I have certainly found an awakening of myself in the Mass since I have started my class. I also feel like I have a deeper understanding of the Mass and reading of the Scriptures. So very thankful for this opportunity."*

May God be praised and may His Eucharistic Kingdom be spread throughout the world!  
If you are interested in becoming a LEM member, visit [www.mercedariansisters.org/lem](http://www.mercedariansisters.org/lem)



Deepening our relationship with God  
at our School of Identity,  
Feb. 21-22, 2025

**Right:** Speakers Fr. Peter Wigton  
and Sarah Kaczmarek answer  
questions.

**Below:** Receiving prayer for  
Baptism of the Holy Spirit.



Worship, teaching, Eucharistic Adoration, and prayer  
at our Transformation Night, March 20, 2025

**Bottom left:** Gathered to worship the Lord.

**Bottom right:** Jeff Cavins gives a teaching about our one priority.



## Encounter School of Ministry Baton Rouge Satellite Campus Teach · Equip · Activate

### What is this?

The ESM School of Ministry is a 2-year, authentically Catholic, training program about more fully activating the gifts of the Holy Spirit given in Baptism, to live out the Christian life bearing greater witness to the faith in your sphere of influence.

### Local to Louisiana

In Baton Rouge, our Sisters have officially started a Satellite Hybrid Campus which offers the flexibility of online video courses, combined with weekly in-person classes to activate what is learned. Classes begin mid-September. Apply by October 1<sup>st</sup>!

### Interested in the School?

Please email [batonrouge@encounterschool.org](mailto:batonrouge@encounterschool.org) or visit [www.encounterschool.org/batonrouge](http://www.encounterschool.org/batonrouge)



# Remembering our Holy Father...



On Easter Monday, April 21, 2025, we arose to news of our Holy Father, Pope Francis' death. Though his health was not great, we were still surprised at the news and began offering all our prayers for the repose of his soul. The providential timing of his passing did not escape our personal reflections or conversations around our tables. How the Lord has drawn the world into the mystery of His Death and Resurrection through Pope Francis this year! May we all find new rest in the hope of our salvation!

The election of a new Pope is quite the experience in Religious Life. Our Sisters were glued to the livestreams of the Sistine Chapel chimney in our classrooms and convents, like so many people around the world, Catholic or not. As soon as the white smoke appeared, we ran to our community rooms and gathered as much as we could to hear our new Pontiff announced. Once again, like many around the world, we were surprised to hear the name Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, Pope Leo XIV. Let us continue to pray for our new Holy Father and rejoice in the hope his call!

## Following Our Hope

**In accord with our vow of obedience, our Sisters are often transferred to follow the Lord where He leads and serve Him in the needs and apostolates of our various communities.**

**The following Sisters have received new obediences for the 2025-2026 school year:**

Sr. Lourdes of the Holy Eucharist Furnells, HMSS  
Sr. Demetria Castro, HMSS  
Sr. Yvelyne Marie Bernard, HMSS  
Sr. Tonia of the Heart of Jesus Borsellino, HMSS  
Sr. Monica Hope Mercedes Waters, HMSS  
Sr. Katherine Joseph Marie Allensworth, HMSS

Local Superior, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Community in Cleveland, Ohio  
San Antonio de Padua Community in San Antonio, Texas  
Our Lady of Mercy Community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
Saint Augustine Community in Gainesville, Florida  
Saint Augustine Community in Gainesville, Florida  
Our Lady of Mercy Community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

*God-willing, upon Professing First Vows this August:*

Sr. Alaina Furman  
Sr. Beatriz Galindo  
Sr. Amanda Marie Hartwell  
Sr. Megan Henle  
Sr. Katie Krantz

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Community in Cleveland, Ohio  
Our Lady of Mercy Community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
Saint Joseph Community in Maumee, Ohio  
Saint Augustine Community in Gainesville, Florida  
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Community in Cleveland, Ohio

*As Regional Superior, Mother Maria Isabel Rodriguez, HMSS, will move to Our Lady of Mercy Community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. All other Sisters not mentioned will remain in their current communities.*

Please pray for our Sisters as they follow the Lover of our souls who is our hope!





## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Summer

*Sisters will be attending camps and conferences in the following places throughout June and July:*

Camp Chatawa (Chatawa, Mississippi)  
 Catholic Youth Summer Camp (Centerburg, Ohio)  
 Life Teen Camp Covecrest (Tiger, Georgia)  
 Life Teen Camp Wild Sky (Medina, Texas)  
 Life Teen Restore Mission Camp (Abbeville, LA)  
 Steubenville South (Alexandria, Louisiana)

### August

10 Entrance to Postulancy  
 15 First Profession  
 22 Entrance to Novitiate

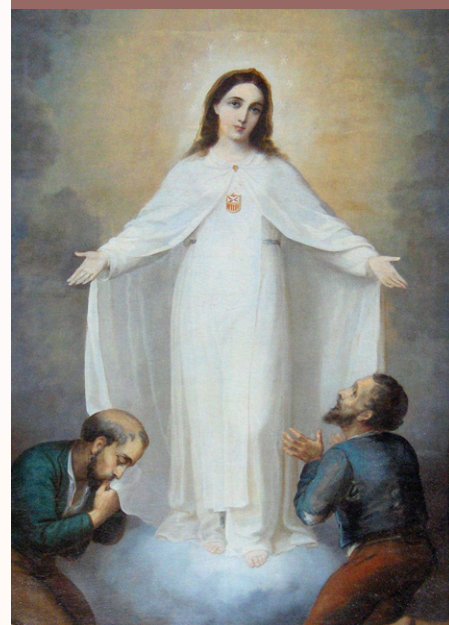
*Connect With Us!*

[MercedarianSisters.org](http://MercedarianSisters.org)



*Vocational Inquiries*

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



*Our Lady of Mercy,  
pray for us!*