This issue of Happenings is filled with stories about our sisters and associates and I am struck by the fact that it is the little things that attracted sisters to a ministry in health care or that made such a difference to those to whom they ministered.

As we recently celebrated the life of Sister Rita during a simple wake service we heard stories from students and employees with whom she interacted. It was always the way she touched the individual with a very personal caring attitude that made the biggest impact. For some, it was the right word at the right time to cheer them. For others it was the fact that she noticed the hidden struggles and encouraged each person.

For our jubilarians, it was the hands-on caring and volunteering and the encouragement provided for those they served. That dedication provided great satisfaction to both the giver and the receiver—faithful women sharing their gifts in the little things.

It was the attention to the needs of catechists and religion teachers that really motivated Saundra Kennedy all through her life. Her story telling could both engage and entertain and we shared many laughs with her through her Cajun jokes.

Each one of the sisters who have shared their reasons for ministry and the challenges they were able to meet opened us to the small things of generous living. I am reminded of some words of wisdom from my mom, “More and more I come to see that love is what it is all about.”

May you join us in rejoicing at the little things that have made all the difference!

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Mission Statement

We are a Franciscan community of sisters who, together with our associates, seek ongoing conversion of heart. We embrace the mystery of the cross as we live gospel values. Faithful to the spirit of our founders we respond to the needs of the time with mercy and compassion while creating possibilities for the future.
Sister Rita Pearce, age 88, died August 4 at Bell Tower Residence Assisted Living in Merrill, WI. Rita Jean was born on November 18, 1931, in Wausau, WI, daughter of John and Sophie (Sherfinski) Pearce. She entered Holy Cross Convent in Merrill, WI, on July 16, 1950, and professed her vows on August 20, 1952. She was in her 68th year of ministry at the time of her death.

Sister Rita, also known as Sister Jacqueline in her early days, received her education at Our Lady of the Holy Cross High School in Merrill, WI; The College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, MN; Edgecliff College, Cincinnati, OH; Alverno College, Milwaukee, WI.

She ministered in religious education in Mercer, WI, and Luling, LA; elementary education in Deer Park, OH, Rhinelander and Antigo, WI. She also ministered as a supervisor at St. Jude Baby Village, New Orleans, LA. Sister was assistant to the coordinator of the senior sisters at Holy Cross Convent, Merrill, WI.

In an earlier interview, Sister said, “I loved working at St. Jude Baby Village. I loved to carry the babies around. Sometimes they spent more time with us then they did with their own mothers. I took good care of them.” She loved volunteering at the Lincoln County Humane Society, holding the animals waiting to be adopted.

Sister Rita is survived be her family of Holy Cross Sisters and associates, nieces, cousins and friends. Preceding her in death were her parents and two brothers.

Visitation and graveside services were held August 7 in Merrill, WI. Burial was at St. Francis Cemetery, Merrill, WI. Memorials can be designated to the Huss Fund and sent to: Holy Cross Sisters, 1400 O’Day Street, Merrill, WI, 54452.

REST IN PEACE!

Holy Cross Associate Saundra Kay Kennedy, Ed.D, passed away on July 28, 2020, in Baton Rouge after a courageous two-year battle with cancer. She called it, “A spiritual journey with cancer.” Saundra was accepted as the first official co-member (today known as associate) of the USA Province in 1985.

Saundra was born in Tampa, Florida, November 4, 1952, to Percy and Mary (Scafidi) Kennedy, the third of five children. She grew up in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi (one hour east of New Orleans).

Saundra received her Doctor of Education from Columbia University in New York City. She spent several years as a Sister of St. Joseph and taught at numerous schools. She worked in sales in Catholic publishing for 27 years and as National Speaker for William H. Sadlier, Inc. In addition to teaching, including sign language, Dr. Kennedy used her God-given talents in so many other ways.

Saundra served on the board of NACAR (the National American Conference of Associates and Religious) for nine years. She was involved in parish life in various ways from pastoral council to Eucharistic Minister and Lector.

Saundra also served as a volunteer in ministering to women in prison. Sister Linda Songy added, “Although her struggle with cancer prevented her from giving this ministry the number of hours that she wanted to, she was given the privilege of being a volunteer chaplain at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women before she died.”

Saundra added, “I’ve always known the Holy Cross Sisters and Associates love and support me. Their love and support has been magnified over the last year.”

In addition to her family of Holy Cross Sisters and associates, Saundra is survived by her brothers, William J. Kennedy (Patti), Richard Eugene Kennedy (Dian); sisters, Constance (Connie) Kennedy Proctor (Thomas), Cheryl Kennedy Ladner; nieces and nephews.

Private graveside services were held at the Gardens of Memory Cemetery in Bay St. Louis, MS, on July 31.
Nursing is one of the most professionally, personally, and spiritually rewarding careers there is. The history of the Holy Cross Sisters in the United States, and for that matter worldwide, is tied to nursing and caring for others’ health needs.

Our two jubilarians this year have something in common—a history of caring for others in the field of nursing. Although Sister Anita Hirt and Sister Dolores Wagner come from different parts of Wisconsin, they both found their calling as Holy Cross Sisters and a ministry as nurses.

**Sister Anita Hirt** was born June 11, 1924, in Reeseville, Wisconsin, one of twelve children, to the late John and Margaret (Landau) Hirt. Her first contact with the Holy Cross Sisters was at a retreat for single women at Holy Cross Convent in Merrill. At the time, she was dating a young man. After much discernment, she entered Holy Cross Convent on August 31, 1948. She made her First Profession on August 24, 1950.

“Sister Lucy Mee saw that I was a caring person and felt that nursing would be a good fit for me,” Sister said. She received a registered nurse degree from St. Alexius Hospital, Bismarck, ND, and became a certified registered nurse anesthetist after studying at St. John’s Hospital, Springfield, IL. Her ministry in nursing and anesthesia would take her to St. Joseph’s Hospital, Dickinson, ND, and at Holy Cross Hospital, Merrill, WI. When she retired and made her home at Bell Tower Residence in Merrill, she volunteered as a part-time nurse.

Sister Anita received the Franciscan Peacemaker Award in 2004 in Fort Worth, Texas. She is known as an exact seamstress. “It started already at home where my mother made all our clothes. I learned how to sew. I worked in the sewing room at Holy Cross Convent with Sister Perpetua. I helped make habits that the sisters wore,” Sister Anita said.

She cannot believe it has been 70 years of ministry.
Sister Dolores Wagner was born Betty Jane Wagner on August 12, 1924, in Wallace, Michigan, to Fred and Minerva Wagner. She grew up in Marinette, Wisconsin, where she converted to Catholicism. Through the urging of Father Howard Ralenkotter, she entered Holy Cross Convent on February 26, 1948. Sister made her First Profession on January 15, 1951.

Prior to entering the convent, Sister attended Mercy Hospital School of Nursing, Oshkosh, WI. She earned a BSN from Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, and a MSN (clinical specialist) from the University of Pennsylvania. She ministered at Holy Cross Hospital, Merrill, WI; St. Joseph’s Hospital, Dickinson, ND; St. Joseph’s Hospital, Breese, IL; instructor in the nursing departments at the following: Kaskaskia College, Centralia, IL; St. Cloud School of Nursing, St. Cloud, MN; University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh; Northeast WI Technical Institute, Green Bay, WI.

Sister Dolores believes that the most fulfilling aspect of her life was becoming a clinical specialist “in order to give better patient care.” Sister found many satisfying chapters in her career. “Passage of the state boards by student nurses; teaching English as a second language; reducing the fear in new expectant mothers, gave me special satisfaction.”

After retiring in 2005, she was a member of the Literacy Council, Bay Area Genealogical Society and New Community Clinic in Green Bay, WI. She moved to Merrill, WI, in 2005 where she taught English as a second language and volunteered at the Free Clinic. Sister also served as sacristan in Holy Cross Chapel.

One of her favorite pastimes was quilting and continuing to research her family history.

Both sisters make their home at Bell Tower Residence Assisted Living, 1500 O’Day Street, Merrill, WI 54452.
The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the medical field and the selfless outpouring of care by doctors and nurses. I looked back at the history of the Holy Cross Sisters and found some common ground on what is happening today to events of the past.

Bishop Vincent Wehrle of the Diocese of Bismarck, North Dakota, needed sisters to staff the new St. Joseph’s Hospital that had just been built in Dickinson, and the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross responded.

On March 22, 1912, six Holy Cross Sisters arrived in Dickinson to begin the work of managing and staffing the new St. Joseph Hospital. Another group of five Holy Cross Sisters arrived the following October. One of the members of this group, Sister Reinolda Husner, had contacted typhoid fever on the journey to the United States and died in December.

Because of wars that began to rage in Europe in 1914 (the start of what became known as World War I), and because governments began to restrict travel and other forms of communications, the 14 Holy Cross Sisters in Dickinson became very isolated from their motherhouse in Switzerland. In addition, as over half the sisters were originally from Germany and Austria, nations identified as enemies of the allied nations of World War I, the Holy Cross Sisters suffered from the anti-German sentiment that began to develop throughout the United States at the time. They also suffered the loss of family members directly engaged in the conflicts in Europe.

Despite the hardships that developed during these years, hardships only exacerbated further by the outbreak in 1918 of the worldwide influenza epidemic, the 14 Holy Cross Sisters persevered. Such was not the case in Ingenbohl. During the second, even stronger wave of the Spanish flu in October 1918, 190 sisters fell ill in the Motherhouse simultaneously taking the lives of nine sisters and four novices. These women, under 30 years of age, were infected while nursing the sick.

In November 1919, the armistice that ended the conflicts of World War I was signed and the flu epidemic began to wane. Communication with the motherhouse in Ingenbohl and their own families opened up. In spite of deep and personal sufferings, the sisters continued to develop their ministry in Dickinson. Soon other ministries in healthcare would open up in Illinois, Wisconsin and elsewhere.

There have been 85 women who, over the course of the Holy Cross Sisters’ history in the United States, ministered in hospitals and other healthcare settings. On the next page we share some of the comments from some of those sisters.
Thoughts from the Past

“Some days were long and full, but I was always given the strength to go on. I would reflect on the words of Jesus, ‘What you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me.’”

S. Loretta Schreiber

“I enjoyed every field of nursing, especially home health which I did until retirement. One of the most challenging aspects of meeting patients needs was the new technology that was introduced to care for patients.”

S. Helen Huss

“My interest in health/nutrition and prevention health in my life, helped me in my main ministry in the kitchen and as dietary supervisor.”

S. Mary Zita Klimek

“Many of the patients I ministered to in Pastoral Care became friends of mine. We enjoyed sharing happenings and stories from the past.”

S. Mary Thomas Reichl

“The great need of the time for nurses in a time of growth in our hospitals determined my future mission. My biggest fear was that I would never be able to stick a needle in someone to give an injection. That fear was overcome by our motto ‘The need of the times is the will of God.’ And I loved my time spent nursing and teaching nursing.”

S. Carol Crosby

“Caring for the whole person, the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of nursing, was part of my focus throughout my career in nursing. I enjoyed getting to know the person and their family. Working collaboratively with the nursing faculty members as a nurse educator at Dickinson State University was very rewarding.”

S. Dorothy Niemann

“During my ministry as an Occupational Therapist, I tried to follow the motto of Fr. Theodosius, ‘The need of the times is the will of God.’”

S. Dolores Hrdina

“I have been a registered nurse for 50 years and have appreciated the experience of caring for and assisting others with their healthcare needs. Ever since I was in grade school I wanted to be a ‘Nursing Sister.’ The Hospital Sisters of the Little Company of Mary inspired me with their care of a family member. I wanted to be just like them. At the present time I volunteer as a nurse in a Free Clinic in Merrill, WI.”

S. Mary Anne Rose
Our Lady of the Holy Cross High School Alumni

Monica (Bloechl) Herman, Class of 1948,
died May 31, 2020, in Marshfield, WI

Helen (Sommers/Baum) Gorecki,
Class of 1963, died July 21, 2020,
in Ringle, WI

To all those who have lost their loved ones due to the Coronavirus outbreak, including Holy Cross Sisters from our International Congregation and other sisters in our country and worldwide, we convey our deepest sympathy.