

## *Sister Sisters* from Upstate Pennsylvania

**Sister Melita Skiendziel** and **Sister Cynthia Skiendziel** are not only Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, but they are also blood sisters. They came to know the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters 77 years ago in their hometown of Swoyersville, PA, where they were taught by the Bernardines at St. Mary's Grade School. Interestingly, their mother had known the Bernardine Sisters in Poland and had considered joining the order.

Sister Melita was the first to feel a call from God and went to Mt. Alvernia High School in Reading, PA with the intention of becoming a Sister. Sister Cynthia went to Marymount High School in Wilkes-Barre, PA with no thought of becoming a Sister—until she went on a school retreat. “That retreat changed my life!”, Sister exclaimed. “That’s when I realized my calling. I certainly surprised my friends and family.”

Our “sister Sisters” have experienced much happiness living out their vocations in the same religious community. **“We love being ‘sister Sisters’ in the Bernardine Franciscan community! We laugh with each other, cry with each other, and challenge each other.”** As the last two living siblings from their family of 15, they have been a great support to one another in balancing their life in community and the needs of their family.

Today, Sister Melita and Sister Cynthia live in the convent at St. Thomas More Parish in Allentown, PA. Sister Melita is retired but helps as best she can at the convent. Sister Cynthia remains engaged in Parish Ministry. **These two “sister Sisters” are happy to remain a loving presence in the Parish as they grow in age.** †



**S. Melita** (left) was a teacher and principal while **S. Cynthia** was a teacher and served in various Parish Ministries. Both Sisters received BAs in education from Villanova University. Sister Melita also received an MA in education from Temple University.



## *Seeds of Faith Flourish* in northern Mozambique

As a young woman, **Sister Helena Marinho de Melo** from Ceara in Brazil, felt a calling from God to become a religious sister and to dedicate her life to serve those in need. Through one of her cousins, Sister Helena came to know the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, and not long after that, she started on a path toward sisterhood.

Having earned a degree in theology, Sister Helena was guided by a deep trust in Divine Providence, and for 23 years, she ministered throughout Brazil. Through her work in religious education, bible study, catechetical work, youth ministry, and mission outreach programs, numerous individuals came to know Jesus and to deepen their faith.

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## *Seeds of Faith Flourish* in northern Mozambique continued from page 1

Six years ago, Sister Helena's journey of faith brought her to the mission of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in the remote, underdeveloped region of northern Mozambique. Here the residents struggle daily as they endure the harsh realities of extreme and abject poverty. Each day, Sister is confronted with the challenge of stretching her very limited resources in order to carry out religious activities as well as provide nutritional and healthcare assistance to those in dire need.

**Sister Helena is profoundly touched by the people's deep trust in God and their amazingly joyful spirit**

**even as they cope with rampant food insecurity, disease, malnourishment, and low literacy.** Just to be with the people gives Sister untold joy and a great sense of reward.

Having ministered for 30 years as a Bernardine in various places, Sister Helena has been instrumental in transforming the lives of countless individuals. **"I feel truly happy knowing that the small seeds of faith I have sown are alive and flourishing,"**

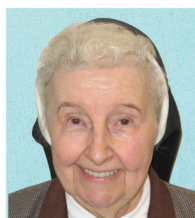
remarked Sister — with a smile! †



## *Where Were You* in 1953?

Maybe you weren't born yet, but for those who were, 1953 was a very significant year. The Korean War was over, Edmund Hillary conquered Mt. Everest, Queen Elizabeth II ascended the throne, and seven women of faith answered God's call to become Bernardine Franciscan Sisters. For 70 years, these Sisters dedicated their lives to God in service to others by zealously living the Gospel of Jesus. Committed to education at all levels from pre-

school through college, they ministered mostly as teachers and/or administrators. Together, they touched the lives of thousands and thousands of children and adults across the United States and in Puerto Rico. We congratulate these Sisters and wish them God's special blessing on their 70th Jubilee (from top left): **S. Carol Anne Heitgen** from Salem, SD; **S. Le Roy Prymak** from Shenandoah, PA; **S. Melita Skiendziel** from Swoyersville, PA; **S. Josita Karnish** from Lansford, PA; **S. Immaculé Zdanowicz** from Wilkes-Barre, PA; **S. La Verne Grippe** from Pottsville, PA; and **S. Dolorey Osowski** from Conshohocken, PA.



## *Retired Sisters* Pray for You

Yes! You are in the daily prayer of over 50 of our retired Sisters at St. Joseph Villa. Each day the Sisters gather to pray for you at morning Mass, at their 11:00 am Holy Hour, and during their Morning and Evening Prayer. Because we strongly believe in the **POWER of PRAYER**, we trust that you are experiencing God's grace at work in your life. We pray that God will grant you inner peace and will help you to live through difficult moments and tough situations you may be facing in your life. Please feel free to send your special intentions through our website [www.bfranciscan.org](http://www.bfranciscan.org) or a phone call.



## *In Remembrance*

Special thanks to those families who have directed their memorial gifts to the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters when their loved ones have died. Let us honor and pray for these beloved individuals who died this past year:

**Bernadette Davis • Virginia Budek • Irene Didyoung • Deanna Gasper • Regina Yoder • John Rule**

## *From the Office* of Development & Mission Advancement

Dear Friend,

One hundred thirty years ago, Mother Veronica Grzedowska, the Foundress of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, traveled from her convent in Poland and set foot on American soil. This simple, yet courageous woman ignited a spark for mission that continues to live on in her followers.

I hope this newsletter gives you a glimpse of the wonderful things that are happening today throughout our missions. God's empowering grace, the dedicated efforts of our Sisters, and the kindness of friends like you "make it happen."

Congratulations to the winners of our Summer Mission Raffle: Ronald Sharp of Indianapolis, IN (\$2,000), Guia Lipawen of Wyomissing, PA (\$1,000), and Stephen Narsavage of Pittston, PA (\$500). Many people in our global missions will benefit from the raffle's \$28,000 profit.

Here at our office we are busily preparing for our annual fundraiser,

Bernardine Bonanza. Exciting things are happening and we are most grateful to the Board, the Bonanza Steering Committee, our sponsors, donors, and those contributing auction items for this event. Visit [www.bfranciscan.org](http://www.bfranciscan.org) for details.

Remember that our Honor and Memorial Mass cards are always available to you. The gift of Mass and prayer is not only a beautiful and meaningful way to remember loved ones who have died, but also a priceless gift to celebrate life's special occasions or give support to those coping with illness or difficulties.

And, thank YOU, for your friendship and your ongoing support. Your loyalty to our Sisters means more than you will ever know. As we move into another new year, I wish you blessings of health and God's peace.

*Sr. Maria*

Sister Maria Bartos, OSF  
Director of Development



*Sister Maria Bartos, OSF, Development Director, with Development Volunteer and Board Member, Susan Morey.*



## *Friend and Advocate* from Dearborn Heights, Michigan



**"It's the least I can do for these devoted women,"** remarked **Honorable Mark Plawecki** of Dearborn Heights, Michigan, when asked why he so faithfully supports the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters. Mark has been a district judge for the State of Michigan since 1994, having been re-elected five times. He earned his juris doctorate in 1987 and practiced law before his judgeship.

Rachel, Lauren, and Monica are Mark's three beautiful daughters who have been blessed with successful careers. He credits much of his daughters' success to their 12 years of education at the Divine Child Schools where the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters have taught for the past 70 years.

Mark is an avid tennis player and enjoys writing books in his free time. The Sisters' prayers were a great support to Mark when he tragically lost his wife, Julie, eight years ago. Julie was a teacher for a number of years at St. Robert Bellarmine in Redford, MI, where the Bernardines also taught and administered the school. Love recently returned to Mark's life when he met and married Mae. They are a loving and giving couple who are involved in numerous charities both at home and abroad.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Mark for his steadfast support over the past 20 years. Our mission in Liberia, West Africa continues to benefit from his ongoing contributions. We are especially grateful to Mark for remembering our Sisters in his estate plans. Thank you, Mark. We feel so honored to have you as our friend and advocate!





Bernardine Franciscan Sisters

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## St. Bernardine Legacy

**John S. Staba, II** of Cranford, New Jersey is a longtime friend and benefactor of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters. John was taught by the Sisters at St. Ann in Garwood, NJ, where his mother volunteered as secretary to Sister Bronisia, the school principal. John spent 40 years working in prison administration where he served as the captain of the county jail. We are most grateful to John for becoming a Legacy Society Member.



"I am a St. Bernardine Legacy Society Member because I believe in the life and mission of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters!

Let's ensure that the Sisters have the resources to continue their work among the poor and to provide care for their elderly sisters."

**Leave a Legacy of Love.  
Become a member today!**

For more information or questions, contact Sister Maria Bartos at 484-334-6815 or [bfdevelop@bfranciscan.org](mailto:bfdevelop@bfranciscan.org)

**SAVE the DATE**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2024**

**Bernardine BONANZA**

The PLEX at Alvernia University  
465 St. Bernardine Street, Reading, PA

Benefiting the BERNARDINE FRANCISCAN SISTERS