

NEWSLETTER OF OUR LADY OF VICTORY MISSIONARY SISTERS

# Visions

July 2021

[www.olvm.org](http://www.olvm.org)

## A New Purpose

Victory Noll buildings provide opportunity  
to improve local community's well-being







Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters is a community of women religious founded in 1922 by Father John Joseph Sigstein. The Victory Noll Motherhouse is located in Huntington, Indiana.

Victory Noll Sisters:

- Proclaim the Word of God
- Stand in solidarity with those living in poverty and oppression
- Foster justice
- Promote the development of leaders

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## ON THE COVER

Representatives of Huntington County, attorneys, and the OLVM Leadership Team meet shortly after finalizing the sale of the Victory Noll buildings on April 23, 2021.

Photo by Paul Siegfried

This place has been sacred for centuries. It is the highest point of land overlooking the hallowed Wabash River, and was recognized by the Native American Miami Tribe as a special location. From here, they could see for miles and survey the life-giving land. And it was from here they

## PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE JOURNEY

held their special ceremonies to give thanks for the blessings that had been bestowed upon them.

That spirit continued to flow when the land became the home of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters after Bishop Noll provided the property to the young congregation and their founder, Father John Joseph Sigstein.

Over the last century, Sisters have passed through the buildings on the Victory Noll campus, getting their training before heading out to ministries across the United States and Bolivia.

The land provided fruit from orchards, crops from farmland, and was home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. It is also the final resting place for the Sisters, Father Sigstein and Bishop Noll.

Now, even as the 100th anniversary celebration of OLVM begins, it is also a time of transition for the land that has been the Sisters' home. The special spirit now flows to Saint Anne Communities, which provides elder care. It flows to Huntington County, which will use the campus buildings for special programs of healing and hope. And it flows to ACRES Land Trust, which will protect and preserve the natural land in a state not too dissimilar to when it was venerated by the Miami Tribe.

This place remains sacred, and we continue to give thanks for the many blessings it provides now and into the future. ❖

## OLVM LEADERSHIP TEAM

*Sister Mary Jo Nelson*

*Sister Lucille Martinez*

*Sister Ginger Downey*

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**Editor:** Paul Siegfried, OLVM Communications Coordinator  
**Leadership Team Liaison:** Sr. Ginger Downey

**Mailing Address:** Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters  
1900 W. Park Drive  
Huntington, IN 46750

**Email:** [info@olvm.org](mailto:info@olvm.org)  
**Website:** [www.olvm.org](http://www.olvm.org)



# Century of service

## Mass in August kicks off year-long celebration of Victory Noll Sisters



**O**n August 5, 1922, a train pulled into the station in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Onboard were two weary Catholic sisters who had been sent there from Chicago by a young priest struggling to establish his fledgling community of catechists.

Father John Joseph Sigstein had a vision to provide for the temporal as well as the spiritual needs of the underserved and overlooked population in New Mexico. He had seen the cycle of abject poverty of the region and was determined to provide whatever services he could.

*“Go to the poorest first. Always have preference for them.”*

— Fr. John Joseph Sigstein

Father Sigstein was true to his word. The work had begun a few years earlier to develop a society of missionary catechists, but when Julia Doyle and Marie Benes stepped off that train, August 5, 1922, became the official inception date of what would eventually become Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters.

Many early benefactors assisted Father Sigstein in his mission, including then-Monsignor John Francis Noll, who provided the new society with land and a mother-house in Huntington, Indiana.

Noll, who later became bishop and then archbishop, supported the newly-named Victory Noll Sisters the rest of his life, and is buried in the OLVM Cemetery alongside Father Sigstein and the hundreds of Sisters who carried their charism across the country and impacted multiple generations with their ministries over the last 100 years.

A year-long celebration of the century of service will begin on August 5, 2021, with a special Mass in the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel on the Victory Noll campus, with Bishop Kevin Rhoades of the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese presiding.



Victory Noll Archives

**Above, Catechists Marie Benes and Julia Doyle are met in Santa Fe, N.M., by Archbishop Albert Daeger. They were the first members of the new Society of Missionary Catechists sent to New Mexico by the community’s founder, Father John Joseph Sigstein (photo right).**



A concluding liturgy is scheduled for August 6, 2022, inviting back to Victory Noll many individuals who have been part of the OLVM journey.

Additional events and information over the next year will be announced on the community website at [www.olvm.org](http://www.olvm.org) and also on social media sites. ❖





# New tenants, same vision

## Huntington County embraces Victory Noll legacy

By Sister Mary Jo Nelson  
OLVM President

It all began with questions...

In February 2017, the OLVM Leadership Team invited a wide variety of human service providers in the Huntington Community to meet with them. We asked them two questions: 1) what is the most critical need in our community, and 2) how could our campus buildings be repurposed to meet this need of the community? We continued this conversation for about 18 months. Although we had no direction for the use of our buildings, we did come away with an expanded consciousness about the systemic drug addiction problem in our city and county.

After several years of exploring options and having many conversations both within and beyond the congregation, the Sisters decided at their 2020 Chapter to give their land back to God and deconstruct our buildings. A follow-up letter about this decision was then sent to

all our colleagues and partners.

A few weeks later, Mayor Richard Strick of Huntington called Sister Mary Jo after he received this letter. He asked, “Are you open to exploring another option for your buildings, or is it too late?” The Leadership Team decided to meet with representatives of Huntington County and City. A couple of weeks later we received a proposal from Huntington County Community Corrections, entitled “Restorative Programming, Residential Service and Treatment.” This program is for persons struggling with addictions, who also have demonstrated a desire to change, are low risk to others, and have a high need for personal formation, job training, life skills development, healing and wellness. These are our neighbors who are on the edge. They need a lot of supportive services to change their lives and become good parents, good friends, good employees, and contribute back to society.

We were both hopeful and cautious, and decided to keep the conversation going.



Photos by Paul Siegfried

**In a presentation to OLVM Sisters on July 22, 2020, Huntington Mayor Richard Strick (left), Huntington Superior Court Judge Jenny Newton (center), and Huntington County Community Corrections executive director Leslie Rentschler (right) detail their proposed plan for the use of the Victory Noll buildings.**

There were three questions we needed to explore with Huntington County.

1. How is there an alignment of the OLVM charism, mission, and values with your dream for “restorative programming, residential services, and treatment?”
2. What is the plan of sustainability for the program, both now and into the future?
3. What is the compatibility among all the entities who share the Victory Noll campus — ACRES Land Trust, Saint Anne Communities, and the OLVM Sisters?

These questions led to a year-long process that included many conversations. We shared information about the history of the Congregation as well as the buildings, including use, maintenance, and renovations. There were numerous tours of the buildings with potential partners from the County. Negotiations were held among collabora-



Photo by Paul Siegfried

**OLVM President Sister Mary Jo Nelson (right) signs paperwork making official the transfer of the Victory Noll Buildings to Huntington County on April 23, 2021. Looking on are (from left), Huntington County Commissioner Tom Wall, Huntington County Community Corrections executive director Leslie Rentschler, and OLVM Sr. Ginger Downey.**

tors, OLVM Sisters, professional resource persons, and Huntington City and County officials.

Over the past year, these questions and more were explored. These led to a discernment and decision by our Sisters to sell our property to Huntington County for the primary purpose of restorative services for our neighbors struggling with addictions and who desire and need a

way forward.

On Friday, April 23, 2021, the Leadership Team signed the documents whereby our three buildings were sold to Huntington County. The OLVM Sisters are renting back St. Joseph’s Building and the Sigstein Apartment for their residential and administrative needs.

As the Victory Noll Sisters begin celebrating their 100th anniversary,



# An honor following in OLVN footsteps

By Leslie Rentschler  
Executive Director  
Huntington County Community Corrections

In order to elicit change leaders must have courage and vision to embrace change and see it as an opportunity.

Almost one hundred years ago a vision that turned into action by the founders of Victory Noll had an understanding that a unique approach must be taken to address the needs of the poor and oppressed. In order to elicit change in this population a great understanding of the challenges facing their success whether it be poverty, drug addiction, lack of education, disability, trauma, or homelessness has to be considered in the approach, development, and implementation of services.

Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters have created that opportunity for Huntington County Community Corrections. Their “vision and action with great love and compassion for the poor and oppressed people” identified with the vision of Community Corrections to provide meaningful, affordable, cost-effective alternatives to the offender population that instills individual accountability while redirecting behaviors using evidence-based practices to provide for successful re-integration into society.

Huntington County Community Corrections has been given the honor to continue in the footsteps of the founders of Victory Noll to expand current services to include restorative programming and treatment in a residential setting.

This opportunity has created a “home” to implement a unique model of service that supports the vision of staff to be servant leaders. As the agents of change we are tasked with the duty to provide the opportunities



Photo by Paul Siegfried

**Leslie Rentschler (right), executive director of Huntington County Community Corrections stands with the OLVN Leadership Team (from left) Sr. Ginger Downey, Sr. Mary Jo Nelson, and Sr. Lucille Martinez, in front of the OLV Building on the Victory Noll Campus.**

to the individuals in the community whose behaviors need to be redirected in a way that encourage personal growth, self-worth, and value of their own contributions to society.

Through the generosity of the OLV Missionary Sisters that opportunity to once again turn vision into action will make a profound impact on Huntington County. ❖

they also celebrate the continuation of their charism and mission through the gift and transfer of their buildings which will be named the “O’Donnell Center.” This name honors Julia and Peter O’Donnell who collaborated with Archbishop John Francis Noll with a vision and generous funding to build the Our Lady of Victory

Building on the Victory Noll Campus, supporting our founder’s dream of a training center for women. The center prepared women to be missionary sisters, who were then sent out to unseen places where people were forgotten, where there was no leadership, few services and limited resources. They were called to bring

their rootedness in God, their gifts and skills, and a huge dose of creativity, initiative, and determination to empower people to be their own leaders, advocates, and to be church. Now, one of our questions about how to continue our missionary legacy is answered through the gift of our buildings to Huntington County. ❖

# Jubilees 2021



Three members of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters celebrated Jubilees on May 24, 2021.



**Sister Valeria  
Foltz**

**Sister Valeria Foltz**, a native of Humphrey, Nebraska, celebrates 80 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVM on October 28, 1941. Her ministry work has taken her to California, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Texas, Ohio and Nebraska. She has served primarily in catechetical ministries, including as a director of catechetics. She has also been a Eucharistic minister.

*“Working in the missions for almost 80 years our mission was to teach, to know, love, and serve God. My heart is filled with God’s love.” — Sr. Valeria*



**Sister Connie  
Lewandowski**

**Sister Connie Lewandowski** has been a Victory Noll Sister for 70 years, entering OLVM on September 6, 1951. She is a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She has served in California, Indiana, New Mexico, Texas, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Michigan, Illinois, Kentucky and Utah. Sr. Connie has worked as catechist and a director of religious education. She has been a caregiver, worked in pastoral care and in the archive office.

*“After 70 years, as I look back at my mission list, I can’t believe that I served in 10 different states with it’s own story & ups and downs. I remember Our Lord & God promised me he would always be with me and HE WAS!! His mother Mary kept reminding me that all will be well and it is!!” — Sr. Connie*



**Sister Angeline  
Walczyk**

**Sister Angeline Walczyk** is celebrating her 70th year as an OLVM Sister. A native of Brush, Colorado, she entered OLVM on September 6, 1951. Sr. Angeline has been missioned in New Mexico, Texas, Wyoming, Colorado, Indiana, Arizona and California. She has been a catechist, community administrator, social worker, caregiver and nurse technician.

*“Precious Jubilee. O, precious vowed life. O, what a privilege to live it. O, what a grace to die with it. O, what a gift to return to God.” — Sr. Angeline*

# The race to save our home

## Heeding the call to action made by Pope Francis



By Sr. Beatrice Haines  
OLVM Social Justice Coordinator

**W**here do you live? Or to put it another way, where do you call home? For a few, home has been the same house and the same town all their life. For others the response to this question has changed over the years, perhaps a couple of times or even many times.

Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters were gifted with our first home near the Forks of the Wabash by Archbishop John Francis Noll and we call it Victory Noll. Then when we went forth “on mission,” the places to which we were sent became home. Everyone can identify different places they have called home over the years. For all of us, however, there is a home that we all share. In 2015 Pope Francis awakened in us a deepened sense

of Mother Earth as a home for all people in his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, which he entitled, “On Care for Our Common Home.”

Why this topic for an Encyclical and why now? More than fifty years ago, Pope St. John XXII, with the world on the brink of nuclear crisis, wrote an Encyclical which not only rejected war but offered a proposal for peace. He addressed his message *Pacem in Terris* to the entire “Catholic World” and in fact to all men and women of good will. Now, in our time, we face a climate crisis so serious that it threatens the life and future of the whole Earth. For this reason, Francis is issuing an urgent call to every person living on Planet Earth, to address the serious threats to our Common Home.

The saying goes, “Home is where your heart is.” Francis is calling us to respond to the challenges he puts

before us, not from our heads, but from our hearts. Men, women and children are an integral part of Earth. So caring for the Earth has to include care for our fellow human beings, especially the most vulnerable.

Francis’ dream in *Laudato Si*, is an Earth healed of devastation and abuse and Humanity healed of divisions and injustice. Like Mary, we may ask “how can this be done?” How can this seemingly “Impossible Dream” be made a reality? Change on the scale needed to save our Earth Home, can be overwhelming, however, Pope Francis believes it is possible. He has mandated the Department at the Vatican called “Promoting Integral Human Development,” to create a worldwide Plan of Action to implement *Laudato Si*. It will involve all aspects of the Catholic Church: parishes, dioceses, organizations and groups, hospitals



and health care centers, educational institutions, religious congregations and families across the world. Francis' hope is that the commitment by the whole Church will create the a critical mass, i.e., a large enough number of people necessary to bring about change of the whole ecosystem. This mandate is energizing, bold and hopeful! And we each have a part to play.

We, Victory Noll Sisters, will be reading and reflecting on *Laudato Si* again and discerning how we have been addressing the need to care for Earth and ways we can continue to do so. Over the years, this has included living simply with gratitude for God's creation and caring for our Victory Noll home. We have planted trees, vegetables and flowers which of course, attract a variety of wild life. The birds, bees and deer are among our favorites. In the mid 1990's we initiated a Cherish the Earth Committee to carry out recommendations flowing from a Land Audit which was done in 1995. This audit helped us bring a more pronounced ecological dimension to our property and culminated in a 10 year plan. Some of the specifics included planting milk weed for monarch butterflies, composting, recycling, promotion of solar ovens and reduction of lawn and mowing. Finally, in 2016 we made the decision to sell 107 acres of trees and prairie to ACRES Land Trust to preserve and protect for future generations.

Pope Francis is calling every person to an ecological conversion, a change of heart and mind that restores our relationships with each other, with creation and with God in our earthly home. This kind of "conversion experience" is described variously by astronauts when they see Earth from space: as indescribably beautiful and fragile, a living reality, awesome and overwhelming. They have a new awareness of the oneness of life and a new self awareness of themselves as a part of nature and the need for them to be in tune with the natural world. This vision of Earth is key to Earth's survival as well as our own. Flowing from this personal conversion is the commitment to action, the commitment to DO SOMETHING. This is the beauty of Pope Francis'



Photo by Sister Ginger Downey

**The sun rises over an open area on the grounds at Victory Noll. In 2016, OLVm sold 107 acres of wooded and prairie land to ACRES Land Trust, which will preserve and protect the area in its natural state.**

challenge to the whole Church to do something and to do it together so that we can make a difference big enough to shift away from destruction and abuse toward unity and care for earth and for all who call the Earth home.

*"Laudato Si, mi' Signore...Praise to you, God of all Creation!" ❖*



Victory Noll Archives

**Sr. Margaret Campbell (right) is pictured with other collaborators on the St. John's Catechism while in Washington, DC, in 1962. It was an updated catechism based upon the Baltimore Catechism. They are joined by Bishop Charles Greco of Alexandria, Louisiana, who was chair of the Bishop's Committee of the National Office of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.**

## Leading the way as catechists

### Victory Noll Sisters collaborated on a national level

**By Jeff Hoffman**  
**OLVM Archivist**

**F**ather John Joseph Sigstein had the Society of Missionary Catechists teaching catechism from their founding.

It was something that the Catechists had become so proficient at, that Catechist Margaret Campbell participated in the National Catechetical Congress in the late 1930's. She was involved in class

demonstrations and panel talks at their annual meetings. By 1939 she was serving on a national CCD committee that was revising the Confraternity Manual that would produce an updated version of the Baltimore Catechism in 1941. After WWII she continued to participate in the annual National Catechetical Congresses and was teaching courses for Catholic University's Pacific Coast Branch.

By the 1950's there was a change in the method of teaching catechism from the traditional question and answer method of the Baltimore Catechism to a "kerygmatic" approach which stressed the importance of the message, the mutual love of God and man, and the importance of Sacred Scriptures and the liturgy. With these changes Sr. Margaret Campbell moved to Washington, DC, in the early 1960's to work with other religious on revising and expanding religion textbooks for the National Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Office. After the Second Vatican Council she helped instruct individuals who would teach these new changes to children and adults.

The "On Our Way" series was published by the W. H. Sadlier for

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** As Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters approach their 100th anniversary, we will be taking a look back at the history of the community in a series of articles, researched and written by OLVM archivist Jeff Hoffman. In this article he details the role of Victory Noll Sisters on the national level in catechetics.*





Victory Noll Archives

**Sisters Alma Bill (left) and Helen Clare Burch work on catechetical materials to be used in religious education across the country in the 1960s. In addition to the school texts, they also produced musical albums to go along with the lessons.**



the elementary student, which included a teacher's guide and student text. At this time the Archdiocese of Los Angeles wanted Junior High texts for the series and asked Sr. Alma Bill and Sr. Helen Clare Burch to compile the 7th grade book for the series. This was a difficult assignment with a whole new world of growth and understanding of theology and spirituality opening up. With the help of some leading theologians as sounding boards, they were able to complete this task just as the Second Vatican Council was ending. This series was entitled "Witnessing for Christ" with a Teacher's Guide and Student Text. They also produced another volume entitled "Preparing for Confirmation." Over two million copies of the Confirmation and 7th grade books were sold.

Sr. Helen Clare was responsible for the chalkboard diagrams that accompanied the Teacher's Guide in these volumes. Fr. Johannes Hofinger, a leading theologian of the time, referred to these diagrams as

"catechetical pearls". There were hundreds of requests for these diagrams to be made available in chart form by catechetical teachers.

Since both of these texts recommended the use of hymns with these texts, and Sr. Alma Bill returned to her previous mission in Willows, California. She formed and directed a Children's Choir that produced two albums that accompanied the lessons in these books. These record albums also contained hymns for use throughout the liturgical year, for the Eucharistic Celebration, and Benediction. Because the production of these albums came towards the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, it not only included hymns in English, but also in Latin.

These are just a few more examples of Victory Noll Sisters out in front in the catechetical area. This time it was with the changes in the methods used to teach catechism between World War II and the Second Vatican Council. ❖



OUR LADY OF VICTORY  
MISSIONARY SISTERS  
1900 W. PARK DRIVE  
HUNTINGTON, IN 46750-8957

# Visions FROM THE VICTORY NOLL ARCHIVES



**V**ictory Noll Sisters are undertaking some major moves these days, but they have been on the move before, ready to pick up and go where they were needed. In the early days of their existence, it might have entailed loading up a pack mule with provisions to cross difficult terrain where there were no roads, such as in this photo taken atop Mount Cristo Rey in New Mexico. ❖