

## SISTER SARA IS BEATIFIED!

*Whoever loses one's life for Christ's sake and  
for the sake of the Gospel will save it.*

(Mark 8:35)

### Sister Sara Salkahazi 1899-1944 • Martyr

Sr. Sara was born on May 11, 1899, in Kosice (at that time part of Hungary). She was only two years old when her father died; her mother became a widow with three children.

Her brother Leopold remembered her as a strong willed little girl who liked to play rough games with the boys. Her schoolmates characterized her as a witty student, who at the same time was very sensitive to social issues, and was a faithful and preserving friend. Her family often witnessed her prayerfulness. She started writing dramas around the tender age of ten.

She earned a degree for teaching in elementary education, and taught for a year. After the peace treaty in Trianon, the region of Kosice was annexed to Slovakia; for political reasons she left teaching and learned bookbinding. In the bindery workshop she experienced first hand the hard life of working women. At the same time, she actively participated in the literary life of the Hungarian minority and acquired a license as a journalist. In her writings, she dealt with the social problems of the working poor, especially that of women. She denounced the injustices affecting their lives and pointed to the need to improve their condition.

In 1922-23 she became the fiancée of a young agronomist. However, after a few months she sent back the engagement ring to him, because she recognized that she could not narrow down her ministry to one family. Around the same time, she discovered the inner call to religious life. She struggled with it for many years; she would have to let go of the lifestyle she had grown to love.

She entered the Sisters of Social Service in 1929. She made her first profession on Pentecost of 1930. Sr. Sara's first assignment was to the Catholic Charity Office in Kosice. Then she was working in many areas: she was editor of a newspaper, lectured, organized the Catholic Women's Movement of Slovensko, supervised charity work, taught religion classes. The very intense work exhausted her so much that her superiors interpreted it as uncertainty in her religious vocation, and in 1934 she did not have permission to renew her vows. In 1937 the Hungarian Benedictines in Brazil asked for a Sister of

Social Service to go there for missionary work. Sr. Sara, who already entertained dreams of going to mission, was asked to go. WWII however, frustrated her plans. After 1938, she was teaching in the Catholic Women's School of Social Work and functioned as a social worker. She made her final profession in 1940.

From 1941, she was the national coordinator of the Catholic Working Girl's and Women's Movement. She wrote editorials in the organization's paper to provide for a firm Catholic teaching for her readers, who were subjected to the Nazi ideology.

Sr. Sara's "spirituality sustained by grace" was informed by her total dedication to God. She obtained the grace of inner freedom and peace, going through the fire of many trials and lack of understanding. She had been ready all the time to represent God's cause with an untiring zeal. Her motto expresses this well – "Alleluia! Here I am, send me!" For the love of Christ, she was ready for everything. In her mystery play about St. Margaret of Hungary she symbolically expressed her own determination – "If you need a sacrifice, here I am. I offer myself!"

With the permission of her superiors she offered herself to God in September 1943, "as the oblation of the Society (SSS), in case the persecution of the Church, the Society of the Sisters" would occur.

To quote from her prayer of offering herself: "Lord, accept my death, with all its pain for the ransom of the Sisters' life, especially that of the elderly, the sick and the weak. In return for my sinful and unworthy life, spare their life from torture and threats, and especially save them from infidelity to You, Lord, to the Church, to their vocation, and to the Society."

After March 19, 1944 (German occupation of Hungary) the Sisters opened their houses to the persecuted. Sister Sara was the administrator of a home for working girls in Budapest. She harbored Jews there and in another house in the countryside, defying Nazi measures of Jewish annihilation. With these, she herself helped close to a hundred people escape. Because of this, the Hungarian

Nazis arrested her on December 27, 1944. The same evening she was taken to the dockyard of the Danube, and shot to death together with a co-worker and a group of Jewish refugees she was hiding. Their bodies were thrown into the icy river. God accepted her self-sacrifice. Nobody else from the Sisters of Social Service was harmed for helping Jews to escape the Nazis.

The Holy See gave permission to start the process for her beatification in January 1997, and on April 28 Pope John Paul II signed the decree that proclaims her to be a martyr.

We pray that we be inflamed by the Holy Spirit, so that we too may respond generously and lovingly to the needs of the marginalized, the persecuted and the weak, as Sister Sara had done. ■



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## A MESSAGE FROM SR. CLAIRE, SSS

Dear Friends,

As a youngster, my mother (who was originally an English major) refused to let me use anything but correct English." The "slang of the day" wouldn't work in my house. "Jeepers," "holy smoke," "gosh," and the like were never spoken and used only as a "second language" at school so I could fit in better with my friends.



More recently I have come to realize the real value in certain words which were not allowed in my house. In particular, the word WOW. It has become, for me, an expression of God's presence in my life;

it's when I am willing and able to see in my heart the true nature of God – the awesome nature of God!

In Holy Spirit chapel this past Pentecost "they were all together in one place" celebrating the presence of the Holy Spirit; in particular in the lives of 12 women whose commitment to God, the Sisters of Social Service and the Gospel ranged from one minute to 60 years – WOW.

- 580 years of vowed life
- three women celebrating 60 years of vowed life
- eight women celebrating 50 years of vowed life
- one woman celebrating her first commitment

In today's world and in the life of the Sisters of Social Service, this truly speaks to the willingness of women to respond to the call of God and the needs of the People of God.

For me the word WOW speaks it all. Please join with us in gratitude for the commitment of these women – for the wonderful example of their service to God's people, and above all for the gifts they bring to all of us.

May the Spirit of Pentecost remain with us throughout the year, and may all of us be willing to accept and use the gifts of the Spirit.

In the recognition of our WOW moments,

I am your Sister,

*Claire, SSS*

# PROFESSION & JUBILEE

Los Angeles-born **Sister Gail Young** made her first profession of vows as a Sister of Social Service during the Pentecost liturgy.



She was drawn to the SSS by its spirit and the fact that ministries were fostered to allow Sisters to go "where their gifts were" in openness to the Holy Spirit. For a number of years, Sister Gail has been involved in prison ministry and has been a leader in the "Get on the Bus" program which enables children to visit their mothers who are in prison. She was also a Chaplain at the Downtown Los Angeles Women's Jail. She values prison ministry and the ability to "advocate for our brothers and sisters in the prison system, following in the footsteps of other Sisters who pioneered this ministry."

After Pentecost Sister Gail studied Spanish in Costa Rica in order to enrich her ministry and facilitate deeper conversation with our sisters in Mexico. She looks forward to the wide possibilities for future ministries that might even take her to other countries where SSS are living and working.

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*This Pentecost eight Sisters celebrated 50 years of profession and two celebrated 60 years—a total of 460 years of active social service to those in need! Sisters were asked about the challenges of those years and also the satisfactions. Their answers give a hint of the diversity and dedication in the group.*

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**Sister Esther Lerch** is known among the SSS as an artist and someone who always has a kind word. Her work with the elderly has become the basis of her current life at St. Joseph's Health Care Center in Ojai, California where she lives next door with 6 others and helps where she can at the Hospital. It's a life that gives her quiet time for prayer and art that gives her joy. Although she thinks of herself as shy, she says she is "kind of an actress," in the way

she reads to the residents to make their life more enjoyable.

Sister Esther's 50 year ministry includes retreat work, parish work and health care. When asked about her greatest challenge, it was beginning her work at St. Dominic's in San Francisco. So much to do and so many people! "I was scared to death," she remembers, "but after visiting the sick I left with joy and felt like I was floating." Later, as a home health aide she would take as many as ten buses a day to see the patients that she tended. Her greatest satisfaction has been "bringing the Lord to the people"—especially taking Holy Communion to those who are bed-ridden or shut-in. Of her 50 years in religious life she says "it is incredible how fast they flew" and that she "is waiting—God willing—for more surprises."



"There's real strength behind that little smile" was the way that African American parishioners at St. Francis Xavier in Baltimore described **Sister Marianna Halsmer**. That's understandable for a five foot tall woman who learned to fly with her aviator brothers in the 1950s and served as a USO dance hostess. During her 50 years as an SSS, Sister Marianna served in a variety of parishes—in California, Oregon, Alabama, Maryland, and Louisiana. She says her greatest challenge—but also most rewarding—was discovering what she didn't know about African American culture when she was assigned to St. Brigid's parish in Los Angeles. Embraced by the love and sense of community she found there she continued to serve primarily in African American parishes—helping to build vibrant parish life.

Working as part of the pastoral team with Father Bill Norvel in four different parishes has given Sister Marianna a deep appreciation of what meaningful liturgy can do for a parish. During her parish work Sister Marianna also listened to and recorded the stories of "the earlier years" of over 100 elderly African American men and women—a work now archived with the Josephite Fathers.

Back in Los Angeles at 86, Sister Marianna has "come home to" St. Bridget's



# Celebrations

where she coordinates a Ministry of Prayer with the elderly.



**Sister Paula Vandegaer's** variety of social work experiences in Missouri and California—camp, settlement house, counseling, adoption services—led her to her current dedication to International Life Services which she founded in 1985. Since 1967 she has been involved in—and was often a founding member of—a variety of programs that created alternatives to abortion and euthanasia, promoted disability rights and a “culture of life” in all

its aspects. Sister Paula developed the first manual, based on social work principles, for training counselors of women making pregnancy decisions. As a colleague in Alternatives to Abortion she opened the first office in downtown Los Angeles for pregnancy counseling.

When asked about her challenges, Sister Paula says that she is “not one to fight and that, moving into ministry, I’ve grown.” A little shy by nature, she says she has learned to step up for what she believes even when there is controversy. Her satisfaction comes from teaching and the response she gets. At present, that includes sharing her love of community life

and prayer and our Benedictine tradition as she lives with participants in Volunteers for Life which she founded nine years ago.



**Sister Mary Anne Bonpane's** life work has been children—many of whom now credit her with their ability to raise their children. After completing graduate school in social work in 1963 she became executive director of Stanford Home for Children in Sacramento. “At the time,” Sister says, “Boy’s Town was very popular and their motto “There is no such thing as a bad boy” was accepted as fact.



## **PENTECOST CELEBRANTS**

*Seated from left to right: Sisters Michaela, Fidelis and Mary Anne.  
Standing from left to right: Sisters Annamaria, Esther, Georgianna, Paula, Marianna, Rachel and Gail.*

However, if girls were placed outside of their own home, they were generally considered “bad”—so my biggest challenge was to convince people that girls deserved the same kind of sympathy and respect that boys had.” During her years at Stanford Home she developed treatment programs for adolescent girls; opened a boys’ home; and a school that met the unique needs of Stanford Home children. For Sister Mary Ann the most satisfying part was being able to offer the girls and boys the help they needed to develop enough trust and security to enjoy their teenage years—and from this memory of love and acceptance, to become secure adults. “These kids who had learned not to trust anyone,” she says, “trusted me because I was a Sister, and because I was a Sister I also had the support and encouragement of my whole community which I certainly needed to do the job.”

In 1987, rather than retire, Sister Mary Anne together with Sister Stephana O’Leary began the Wind Youth Center in Sacramento as a day center for homeless and runaway teens—a work with which they are still connected.



**Sister Michaela Schmeltz** was drawn to social work in college through working in a program that reached out to the elderly. Coming to the SSS from Kansas City, Missouri she returned there twice to work at Guadalupe Center on the city’s Westside. Her first challenge was the poverty she encountered and had been unaware of in her own city—no garbage pick-up, lack of inside bathrooms, bad streets. Initially as a group worker there and then as Director she served all ages and participated in the changes that the neighborhood experienced. Her ministry includes parish work at St. Augustine’s in Culver City, CYO and camp in San Francisco, and casework at Catholic Social Services in Vallejo. In 1989 Sister began work with hospice at Queen of the Valley Hospital and became certified for pastoral care. For the past several years she has worked with various home health agencies as a medical social worker. Although enjoying her other ministries, Sister Michaela’s most satisfying experience has been in the medical field. She currently works with Interim, an in-home agency—coming full circle from her college experience. Of her years in the SSS, Sister says that “even though I have been on this spiritual journey

for a long time, I continue to try and use the gifts God has given me to help others and love them unconditionally.”



Much of **Sister Rachel Shepard’s** early ministry was parish social work in California and Oregon. She worked with troubled girls at Stella Maris in Los Angeles and Stanford Home in Sacramento, counseled children at CYO camp in San Francisco and families at Catholic Social Service in Woodland and Vallejo. Although working full-time she was committed to finish college—attending twelve of them along the way—and after doing that, she completed an MSW and a two-year fellowship at Reiss-Davis Clinic in Los Angeles.

Asked about challenges, Sister Rachel described the turbulent times in the 1960s

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after she entered religious life. “Amid the shifts that were taking place in Church and society,” she says, “the challenge was to be faithful to your own path, to let go of externals and old structures and to discern what was important, then go with it and be of service to people.” When thinking about satisfactions, Sister Rachel remembered her surprise and satisfaction at pulling together teachers and the 500 children that showed up for a summer school program. “I learned I could organize,” she says, “after taking on something that hadn’t been done before.”

Working in San Francisco since 1984, Sister Rachel has supervised social workers at Suicide Prevention, walked the streets to connect homeless seniors with needed services, counseled people through her private practice and worked in Adult Day Health so that people who could not live alone might remain independent longer. For more than 10 years she also sang with the San Francisco Choral Society. Reflecting on the Jubilarians’

Pentecost, Sister Rachel said that for 50 years she, like they, had lived religious life to the best of their ability and intended to see it through to the end.



**Sister Annamaria Rebus** came to the SSS as a Registered Nurse at a time when ministry choices for religious were more limited than today. Her first challenge was (then) Cardinal McIntyre’s belief that, since we were a social work Community, she ought to be one too. Called from the work she knew to a ministry for which she had little training moved her out of her “comfort zone” and into parish social work—and a “sink or swim mentality”—for the next fifteen years. “In the end,” she says, “it became a blessing in disguise in that it gave me experience in family visiting which became an invaluable tool for me when I got into home health care.” After finishing a BS in Nursing and a Master’s Degree in Psychiatric Nursing and Community Health, Sister found her niche in home health care—a niche she has developed since 1976.

For Sister Annamaria—whose friendly manner is engaging—her greatest satisfaction has been the opportunities she has had to interact with many people. First in her parish work and then in the field of nursing she met people from all walks of life and from every socio-economic strata. “This really helped me,” she says, “to grow in humility and awareness of the human condition.”

Initially, coming with a different ministry than what the SSS traditionally did made her wonder if she really belonged. It was the support of close friends and living in smaller house settings through the years that made her “hang in there.” Now that she is retiring, Sister Annamaria enjoys the additional time for prayer, sorting recipes and taking it a little easier.



**Sister Fidelis Frank** came to the SSS prepared with the Benedictine spirit by her years growing up in Mount Angel, Oregon where Benedictine sisters and priests were part of the landscape. Her empathy for the petty criminals she saw in her work at the Portland Police Station and the poor situations from which they came readied

*(continued on page 6)*

# In Memory



## **Sister Corita Lucas, SSS**

August 10, 1918 – May 18, 2006

*I Can Do All Things in  
Him Who Strengthens Me*

Born in Lafayette California, Sister Corita was one of seven children. She followed her older sister, Sister Magdalen, to the Sisters of Social Service when she entered in 1938. She spent the first three decades working in Los Angeles. In 1972 she moved to Sacramento, where she became especially well known for her devoted ministry to the poor, the sick and the elderly of the Cathedral parish. Sister Corita returned to Los Angeles, where she died at age 87.



## **Sister Barbara Gienger, SSS**

November 21, 1908 – June 22, 2006

*Through Him and with Him and in Him*

Born in the “city by the bay,” Sister Barbara was always a San Franciscan at heart. Joining the community in 1938, her first assignment took her back to the Bay Area to work at St. Raphael’s Church. After more than a decade at Stanford Home in Sacramento, Sister Barbara served again in the Bay Area in San Francisco and Oakland, and then moved to Los Angeles, where she remained until her death at age 97. Sister Barbara’s warmth and hospitality were legendary. When she developed plans for her services, it was a surprise to no one that Sister Barbara’s final instructions included a party. A fitting celebration for a much-admired woman.



## **Sister Pauline Jen, SSS**

May 8, 1923 – June 17, 2006

*I Live, Not I, But Christ Lives in Me*

Sister Pauline was born in Beijing. She became a Catholic after moving to Shanghai, where she first met the Sisters of Social Service. Pauline joined the community in Shanghai in the late 40’s, but was unable to continue her formation due to the political situation. Her arrival in Encino in January 1959 was a cause of great joy. Her work in Los Angeles was primarily at Regis House. In 1965 she was one of the initial Sisters of Social Service to begin our ministry in Taiwan. She returned to the U.S. to obtain a graduate degree in family counseling, and then returned to Taipei to minister in the Hua Ming Counseling Center. It is for this innovative work with families that Sister Pauline became known throughout Taiwan. She returned to God in Taipei in June 2006 at age 83.



## **Sister Elfrieda Stitz, SSS**

February 9, 1916 – July 2, 2006

*For He That Is Mighty Has Done  
Great Things in Me*

Hailing from Salem Oregon, Sister Elfrieda was the youngest of seven children – all girls. Four of the girls entered religious life – in four different communities. Sister Elfrieda joined the SSS in 1945, a year after graduating from college in Oregon. She ministered in Los Angeles until moving to Catholic University to obtain a graduate degree in social work. The next phase in her ministry was working in Catholic Social Service in San Rafael, Stanford Home in Sacramento and Holy Family Adoption Services in Los Angeles. In 1966 she moved to Taiwan to assist in the then-new ministry in Taipei. When she returned to the U.S. in 1971, she served at Stella Maris Center and Holy Spirit Retreat Center. Known for her ever cheerful attitude, she entered eternal life in July 2006 at age 90.

## **MEMORIAL MASS**

### **You’re Invited**

We invite you to celebrate a Memorial Mass remembering all of our deceased family and friends on  
November 2, 2006, 11:00 am.  
Holy Spirit Chapel • 4316 Lanai Road • Encino  
Light lunch will follow our Liturgy.

Please RSVP both for lunch and to list the names of those you would like remembered at this Mass  
to Lis at 818-784-4515

**CELEBRATION**

*(continued on page 6)*

her for the Community's social service ministries.

After profession, Sister Fidelis worked at the Catholic Community Library in Kansas City, Missouri, in parish ministry in Santa Clara, and counseling with Catholic Social Service in Vallejo. She worked in two downtown Cathedral parishes—in Sacramento and in Portland.

While working in Portland, Sister ministered to the very poor and homeless in the parish and worked with various community groups on neighborhood improvements. She loved to be the one to open the parish house door to people who called because she "wanted to meet them." (There is a plaque on the door

now acknowledging the way she greeted people for over 25 years.) Her most challenging experiences were working with the mentally ill and getting them the help they needed. Her greatest satisfaction was her opportunity to work with poor people.

Sister Fidelis values community living and our liturgical life. She sees our "family spirit" as a family of adults who share a common spirit. Of the ups and downs that come with life, Sister says, "when I had a challenge there was always somebody there."



"Sixty years is not a long time in the scheme of things," wrote **Sister**

**Georgianna Cahill.** As an SSS, however, Sister packed those years through a lifelong career in social work—administering a wide-range of services that improved the lives of Californians living in poverty. One might say that was a long way from her thoughts of pursuing music as a youth in Iowa playing the saxophone.

Sister began at Regis House in Los Angeles and worked with troubled girls at Stanford Home in Sacramento. Much of her social work ministry has been in Los Angeles working in various aspects of CYO and Catholic Charities. "I learned what a mosaic LA was," she says looking back on her days doing street outreach with local gangs. "I knew they would protect me because they had respect for my being a Sister."

Sister Georgianna became a field director and then branch executive for activities covering the San Fernando Valley. She worked with area priests in East LA and then in South Central LA who were working to improve the neighborhoods in which they served. She became CYO Director for the Diocese of Los Angeles and later Catholic Charities Director for the Diocese of San Bernardino where she worked until recently. The size, diversity, complexity and scope of this ministry was her biggest challenge, she says. Looking back, her most satisfying work was refugee resettlement—Cuban and then those from countries affected by the Vietnam War. Equally satisfying in her work has been seeing staff grow and accomplishing things. ■

*"We offer our sincere thanks to all of our generous donors. Without your support we would not be as effective in our ministry. Again we are grateful to all of you who are able to support our ministries with your donations."*

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