



Bridges

August 21, 2026

Celebrating 70 Years of Profession



The jubilant with Sr. Claire Dandeneau.



(L. to R.) Srs. Priscilla Lemine, Dina Marie Garcia, Vivian Patenaude, and Janice Farnham.



Srs. Lucie Jasseume and Bernatte Oliva enjoying their ice cream.

Sr. Fatima Vinamonte with Sr. Lucie and Srs. Therese Picard and Gertrude Lavoie.

It's no small thing to reach a 70th anniversary, and Sr. Shirley Ann Leveille's sisters at Marillac made sure that the day did not go unmarked. At Shirley's suggestion, refreshments for the August 14th gathering featured ice cream, and the photos indicate that this suggestion was well received! After reading in Janice's recent publication, *WELLSPRINGS*, that the members of the Pious Union marked an anniversary by praying together the Memorare, Shirley offered that as the opening prayer.

She also shared photos, including one featuring her profession group of eight. That triggered many memories on the part of those present – experiences in ministry and community from earlier days with Shirley and her seven companions. As one sister remarked, “Going back in time was a joyous blessing.”

That may also be true for many of those reading this, so here they are, the newly professed of 1956: Yvonne Marie Pigeon; Mary Leonard Haché; Estelle Gravel; Lorraine Charpentier; Rose Marie Kavanaugh; Catherine Durkin, Anne Egan, and, of course, Shirley Ann Leveille.



5 of the original 8 at their Silver Jubilee: Mary Leonard, Estelle, Anne, Catherine, Shirley.

Welcoming Marie Jo, RJM with our sisters in Cameroun



Srs. Jackie (holding flower) and Marie Jo in center, with 2 novices.

It was a very exciting day for me when Mary and Rosemary shared with me that Marie Jo Desir, a Haitian woman whom I had accompanied in her early stage of formation in Haiti, was accepted for religious profession as a Religious of Jesus and Mary and that she would be making her profession on August 8 in Cameroun. Because of the violent unrest in Haiti these past few years, the USA/Haiti province has been obliged to send Haitian women to Cameroun to continue their religious formation when they are ready for novitiate. There they can join other young women to take part in the African Province's well-developed formation program in French, which is a familiar language for educated Haitians. Immediately when I heard the news of Marie Jo's planned religious profession, I expressed a desire to go to Cameroun for the occasion. The Leadership Team was in favor of my going and representing the USA/Haiti province so plans for my travel began.

Obtaining a visa for travel to Cameroun was not very complicated, but travel to Cameroun was going to require a whole day. On the evening of August 5, I left on my first 8-hour flight from Boston to Paris. Though slightly delayed, I had ample time to take my next 7 ¼ - hour flight from Paris to Yaoundé Cameroun, my final destination.

Arriving in Cameroun I was warmly greeted by the provincial of Africa, Sr. Linda Abicha, and her driver. It was about a 30-minute drive to the novitiate house in Yaounde where I received an equally warm welcome from 12 of the 15 community members. The three young women who would be making profession were on retreat, though we were able to greet them briefly when we stopped to pick up Sr. Judith Dossa, the mistress of novices, who was with them at the retreat center.

The three who made their profession were from 3 different countries: Cameroun, Haiti, and Nigeria. The 6 novices beginning their second year of novitiate are all from Nigeria as are the 4 first year novices. The week after the profession Mass 2 postulants were going to join the community: one from Gabon and 1 from Nigeria. The structure for postulants is that these candidates spend one year in their native country before they join the formation community. Besides the women in formation there are 3 professed religious in the community: the novice mistress and 2 sisters who each work in one of the schools directed by RJM's. The women in formation take some theology and scripture classes and also take part in inter-congregational sessions on religious life and personal development. They also follow the usual times of daily prayer and share in the many "tasks" of the house which include cooking, cleaning, gardening, and taking care of chickens and their guard dogs.



Jackie with Sr. Linda Abicha,
Provincial of RJM African Province.



Srs. Jackie and Linola join the newly professed (in white) together with other RJM's who attended the celebration.

The occasion of first profession is celebrated more simply than the final profession. It was held in the chapel of the formation house which limited the number of guests who could be invited. Some co-workers, members of the Family of Jesus and Mary, members of the family of the one novice who was from Yaoundé were among the limited number of attendees.

Cameroun is a multi-lingual country with both French and English being official languages. The Liturgy reflected this as some readings and songs were in each of these languages along with a bit of Spanish and a triumphant Gloria sung in one of the native languages accompanied by rhythmic instruments and spirited movements. Our African Province includes missions in 5 countries with either French, English, or Spanish as the dominant language, in addition to different tribal tongues.

Besides participating in the celebration of the profession ceremony I was taken to visit the three schools operated by the Religious of Jesus and Mary: 2 preschools (maternelle) that educate 300-400 students each and one secondary school that can boast an attendance of 2,100 students who achieve superior academic success making that school rank 5th in achievements for all of Cameroun! Each of the schools, including the preschools, have two tracts in which parents enroll their children: either one in French or one in English.

I was given a brief tour of parts of Yaoundé which included a visit to the second convent which is about 20 minutes' drive from the Formation house, the community which Marie Jo has joined for the coming year. They will be 8 in that community, several who work in the secondary school and two who work in the preschool, including Marie Jo who will work part-time in the preschool. Along with two other young professed sisters Marie Jo will also be taking theology courses at a diocesan Institut attached to the Catholic University of Central Africa and located not far from the Basilica Mary Queen of the Apostles which I was also able to visit.

While more developed than many parts of Haiti, riding through the pot-holed streets of Yaoundé I did see sights that reminded me of Haiti such as the many, many little shops scattered wherever someone found a place and could sell their various goods, both edible and practical. To my surprise we visited an indoor "Mall", complete with more expensive imported goods, familiar eateries and games of chance in which some hoped to win a little extra money.

It is hard to recount all of the sights and sounds of my time in Cameroun, but I hope that this might give an overview of some of my experiences. I again thank the leadership of our USA/Haiti province for allowing me the privilege of being present with Marie Jo and her companions on their special day and for letting me live the reality that we are indeed one as we walk together in hope of creating a more just and loving world.

Celebrating 70 Years of LCWR



Again this year, it was a privilege for me to attend the annual LCWR Assembly, held this year in Orlando, Florida. Rather than following the usual format, this year's Assembly celebrated the 70th anniversary of LCWR and welcomed sisters and organizations from across the Americas and beyond. More than 1,300 people gathered—a remarkable experience of such diversity!

The 70th Anniversary Video was a wonderful overview of the path LCWR has taken. We can applaud the many changes that have taken place over these 70 years and the wonderful diversity that exists today, while we remain united in the one Spirit and one Charism of religious life. If the video becomes available for general viewing, I will let you know.

I hope you have had an opportunity to read the email sent to Province members on August 13, which included stories from Global Sisters Report highlighting this year's Assembly. I also encourage you to visit LCWR.org to read firsthand accounts and explore talks and experiences from the Assembly.

Conversations in the Spirit

This year, the traditional didactic style of presentations from “the experts” was replaced by opportunities to reflect and converse with one another. In many ways, we were putting into practice the true spirit of Synodality and “Conversations in the Spirit.”

I especially enjoyed the number of sisters who, upon seeing the initials “RJM” on my nametag, would pause and say something like, “RJM...hmmm! Are you in New York? Did you ever have a place called Bethany? I made a retreat there! I'll never forget it!”

How happy each one was to hear that Bethany is open again, now with a new face as a center for integral ecological education.

I was also delighted to see in person, for the first time, people with whom I have had hours of conversations via Zoom -- members of the Collaborative for Border Ministries of San Diego, Catholic Energies, Friends in Solidarity (South Sudan), and others. Yes, women religious continue to be a moral force impacting our world and we are part of it all!





Catholic sisters take part in a Jericho Walk, a ritual addressing issues such as racism, violence, and climate change, as part of the LCWR assembly on Aug. 14 in Orlando, Florida. (GSR photo/ Dan Stockman)

The Jericho Walk

A very special moment for me at the Assembly was the Jericho Walk—a ritual of song, prayer, and silence as a form of nonviolent public witness. It is rooted in the Old Testament and takes its name from the biblical story of Joshua and the Israelites marching seven times around the walled city of Jericho.

In Orlando, our walk called attention to issues such as racism, violence, and climate change. The walk had originally been planned to take place outside the hotel, but officials were unable to secure the necessary permits, so the seven circuits took place around the hotel pool area.

What touched me most deeply was the Litany that called upon the founders of each religious community represented, with the ever-echoing response: “Pray for us!”

I couldn’t help but think of and pray to our own Claudine, and to the holy RJMs who have gone before us. I imagined them standing with us, praying and advocating for the issues of our day. What a gift to be part of this continuing story of RJM and religious life!

Mary Bourdon, RJM

Continuing Prayers For:



- **Brenda Mejia**, who will soon begin treatment for thyroid cancer. Brenda is a member of a refugee family in Maryland, and recently gave birth to a baby boy.
- **Sr. Teresita Morse’s niece Jennifer Morse Meisenkothen**
- **A friend of Mary Ann (Augello) Berdoe, Dr. Dee Tomeo**
- **Edward Stolba**, brother of Sr. Janet Stolba
- **Michele Higgins**, the sister of Sr. Pat Dillon
- **For Colleen Pusateri**, who is the daughter of Lorrie Kenney, niece of Sr Eugenia Castonguay
- **Sr. Jill Weber, RSM**, who has previously done work in Haiti. She has had an unexpected medical emergency and is in critical condition.

Image Courtesy of Unsplash

Praised forever be Jesus and Mary