Congratulations to the Newly Elected Leadership Team of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell

Left to right: Sister Lena Picillo, Councilor; Sister Patricia Tavis, Vicarress; Sister Marie Mueller, Councilor; and Sister Luella Ramm, Prioress

"Be who you were meant to be and you will set the world on fire."

Saint Catherine of Siena

Saint Catherine of Siena
Dear Friends,

During this time of Thanksgiving we give thanks and praise to God for all the ways you accompany us on our missionary endeavors. Your prayers and your loving support sustain us as we strive to live out our Dominican heritage and calling.

Everyone likes a good story! If you’ve ever been to Hawaii and met someone who wants to know you better, they would say, “Let’s go talk story.” In this issue of The Flame we are “talking story.” We highlight our newly elected leadership team; focus on our 21 sisters celebrating jubilees; feature one of our sisters who is an infectious disease doctor ministering with Covid-19 patients; and, lastly, we share glimpses of our beloved sisters who have died since our last issue.

We hope you enjoy this issue of The Flame. And if you have any stories about some of our sisters who have been a part of your life, we would love to hear from you. Perhaps we could use them in other issues of The Flame or on our website.

In closing, we assure each of you a special remembrance in our prayers and good works. You encourage us by your loving and generous support. You are forever a part of our lives. And for that we give thanks and praise once again.

Blessings,

Sister Luella Ramm, OP
Prioress
As she was growing up in Nigeria, Sister Uchenna Okereke, OP, was influenced by her father, one of a few in her neighborhood who owned an automobile. If anyone needed a ride to the hospital or to a doctor, neighbors called on him. He was the ambulance, Sister Uchenna said. His witness, as well as her teaching of biology, physics, and chemistry for nine years in the United States, helped her realize her own calling to study medicine and help those most in need. Her heart has always been with those who are poor, people living on the margins of society.

Sister Uchenna studied medicine at George Washington University, Washington, DC, and did her residency at St. Joseph Hospital, Paterson, NJ. Curious about the immune system and various types of infections, she chose to study infectious diseases, currently a new and evolving field in medicine. Sister studied at Rutgers University New Jersey Medical School pursuing this field. The American Board of Internal Medicine certified her as a diplomate in infectious diseases. Sister Uchenna is most grateful to her Dominican Congregation for having allowed her to pursue medicine.

Today, Doctor Uchenna Okereke happily serves as the Medical Director of Infectious Disease and Epidemiology at Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center in Johnstown, PA. As an infectious disease doctor, she is able to “see the poorest of the poor” due to the propensity for infection and HIV. Her work is very challenging. “Every time someone comes for help, you never know what needs to be addressed.” Her extensive studies and her expertise in diagnosing are invaluable to staff and patients alike.

Regarding the current Covid-19 pandemic, Conemaugh Medical Center has experienced similar situations as in other places. “People come and go, and hope to survive. Most situations involve couples, passing the virus from one to the other, a few not able to make it out alive. Some have come for testing, and, if they are not seriously ill, they may be sent to quarantine at home, others are admitted.”

Doctor Okereke recalled seeing four members of one family. A mother came in with the virus, went home, but came back with heart failure. That patient is now on hospice. Then her son-in-law came and was discharged; next, the daughter, who was also discharged. The fourth member “who may not make it” is now hospitalized.

Most of the patients have been in their fifties, but lately she sees older people, many due to not wearing masks. “Sometimes,” commented Doctor Okereke, “it is very frustrating. People are sick and we have nothing to treat the patients with or we lack the necessary protective gear.”

The pandemic is still present, but the team at Conemaugh, led by Doctor Okereke, will continue to do everything in their power to offer excellent and compassionate care. And those of us who know and love our Sister Uchenna realize her healing love-energy is a graced gift she offers generously to all in need.
On August 22, 2020, a beautiful summer day, Cardinal Joseph Tobin, C.Ss.R, celebrated the Liturgy of the Eucharist that marked the formal transition of Sister Luella Ramm, prioress; Sister Patricia Tavis, vicaress; Sister Lena Picillo, councilor; and Sister Marie Mueller, councilor; to formally assume administration of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Caldwell, New Jersey.

The gathered community was welcomed by Sister Patrice, the twelfth prioress, who had just completed her term. Sister Patrice and her Council invited all members of the Congregation to promulgate the chapter direction formed at the Chapter of Life and Mission. The Congregation wholeheartedly supported that direction.

During the Rite of Installation, incorporated into the Mass, Sister Patrice invited Sister Luella to accept the responsibilities of the office of prioress. Sister Luella then called forth each new councilor. After the outgoing Council placed symbolic stoles on each new member of the leadership team, Sister Luella led her Council in a statement of commitment. Members of the Congregation responded by their own pledge of support, cooperation, creativity, and initiative to assist the Council to bring the directives formed at the Chapter to the best possible outcome.

Cardinal Tobin’s homily, based on Matthew 16, tells of Jesus calling Peter to lead the Church. “This appointment doesn’t make a leader,” the Cardinal said. “A leader is one who builds a strong team. She invites the Congregation to join with the team to accomplish the goals. Her witness to gospel values makes a leader.”
Ordinarily, the gathered body would include our associates, members of our boards of trustees, colleagues in ministry, sisters from other Congregations, family, and friends. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were limited to congregational members only. Throughout our history, the transition liturgy has been ordinarily held in our Motherhouse chapel. However, due to lack of space for appropriate distancing, the liturgy was held in the gymnasium of Caldwell University. This day, unlike any other, is a day to remember.

After enjoying a celebratory supper, the sisters left the gathering with hopeful and joyful hearts!

At the conclusion of the liturgy, Sister Luella gave a stirring challenge to the Congregation to remember how we as Dominicans preach. Quoting our current Master General, Father Gerard Francisco Timoner, OP, Sister Luella reiterated some of his words.

We are preachers even when we are not preaching.
We are preaching even if in our old age we can no longer speak.
We are preachers even if we are not ordained.
We are preachers even if we are sick...
We are preachers. That is our identity.
Sister Luella Ramm, OP, a dedicated, prayerful woman, has a deep love for our sisters and is always attentive to their needs. She is known to her sisters as a kind and generous person. Because of her many ministries over the years, she has a broad-based institutional knowledge of our congregational sponsored works and a great financial background to accompany that knowledge. Also, because many of her ministries have been behind the scenes, much of her work has been unnoticed.

Two are clearly visible. She was part of the team that beautifully renovated the chapel in Saint Catherine of Siena Convent and Healthcare Center. And one of her dreams and accomplishments was overseeing the building of Sacred Heart Convent, incorporating many environmentally-friendly, energy-saving components, where thirty-three sisters now live in community.

Objective in decision making, Sister Luella has a real talent for interacting with architects, designers, construction workers, and financial advisors. People who work with her are often surprised that her serious manner is quickly balanced by her quick, dry sense of humor.

Sister Luella earned her bachelor’s degree in elementary education and sociology from Caldwell University and her master’s in administration and finance from the University of Notre Dame, IN. She also studied nursing home administration at William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ, and received her long term care administrator’s license from the State of New Jersey Department of Health.

In addition to her teaching, Sister Luella is capable of adapting to various situations. Besides serving as management administrator at Saint Catherine of Siena Convent and Healthcare Center, she has been a business manager at one of our academies and a director of finance and plant manager at another. For a time she was comptroller and CFO for the Sisters of Saint Dominic, Blauvelt, NY. For our own Congregation, she has served as treasurer, as councilor, and as vicearess. She has also served on many of our boards of trustees.

Sister Luella treasures the memory of having made her final profession at Holy Cross Convent, Regensburg, Germany, founded in 1233, the community from which our Caldwell Congregation was founded. Recently, Lacordaire Academy honored her with the Lumen Award, given to a recipient whose selfless dedication serves as a beacon of light. On the day she was elected prioress, a hopeful future shone in her eyes!

Spiritually grounded, Sister Patricia Tavis, OP, is a resilient and resourceful woman deeply connected to whatever ministry she’s involved in. Her dedication to the legacy of our sponsored works knows no bounds and she is always willing to go the extra mile. For the past five years, she has served as a council member on our congregational leadership team and was invaluable to them and to the community.

Members of the team benefited from her joyful spirit, her understanding heart, and her organizational skills.

Sister Pat received her bachelor’s degree in education and religious studies from Caldwell University and her master’s in administration and supervision from Seton Hall University. She also received her doctorate in educational leadership, management, and policy from Seton Hall University.
Besides serving on every board of our sponsored works, Sister Pat serves on the task force of the Dominican Veritas Ministries, a collaborative group with other Dominican Congregations, to create a system to ensure the continuation of Dominican schools nationwide when sisters’ Congregations can no longer sustain them. Sister is an executive board member of DASS (Dominican Association of Secondary Schools), an organization which focuses on extending the Dominican charism through collaboration with school leaders and their communities. She also serves on the OPSCC Task Force on Shared Canonical Governance to develop a proposed model for leadership for Dominican congregations in the New York/New Jersey area.

As a former inspirational teacher, principal, and supervisor, Sister Pat has high regard for education and sees it as an instrument to preach the Good News. Her doctoral work culminated in a thesis studying sponsorship of schools, a theme close to her heart. She deeply impressed the professors and school superintendent attending her presentation of it. She has also brought her compassionate care to the patients at Saint Catherine of Siena Convent and Healthcare Center and always keeps a soft spot in her heart for our elder sisters and for each of her family members.

The work of solidarity across borders begins in local communities. Sister Lena Picillo, OP, knows this very well. She has a compassionate heart for people living on the margins and has involved students and faculty alike in the significant work of crossing borders. As campus minister at Mount Saint Dominic Academy this past year, she brought faculty and students to serve arriving asylum-seekers near McAllen, Texas, to the Humanitarian Respite Center for Refugees. In another instance, she invited students to Camp Sunshine, Casco, ME, to accompany and support families who have a child or children with life-threatening illnesses. Sister Lena’s ministry has carried her beyond the United States to the Dominican Republic, Belize, and Abaco, Bahamas. She is never one to step aside when she sees a need.

Her love for God and God’s people, her outgoing personality, her educational background, her counseling skills, and experience have served her and others well. She received her bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Kean University, Union, NJ, and her master’s in private school administration from the University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA. She also did postgraduate studies in counseling psychology at Caldwell University, Caldwell, NJ.

In addition to teaching and administration in many schools, she has broad experience in budget control and overseeing and managing financial responsibilities. She has served on many boards of education and has led many workshops both locally and around the country. Sister Lena is a member of the Commission on Global Issues and also serves on the OPSCC Task Force on Shared Canonical Governance. Previously, she served the Congregation as formation director and also as a member of the chapter planning committee.
Sister Lena models her commitment to justice and peace through her generosity and passion for people who have suffered domestic violence, people who are homeless, and those who have been trafficked. She has worked with people suffering from earthquakes and hurricanes; volunteered in soup kitchens, built for Habitat for Humanity, and did crisis counseling at battered women shelters. Sister Lena has received a number of honors in recognition of her dedicated service to others including the Mille Grazie award by the Rutherford Chapter of UNICO and the Congregation’s Peace Award.

As an outstanding and collaborative educator, leader, administrator, and counselor, Sister Lena worked on the local, state, and national levels and saw all as extended family. She brings these gifts as well as her great energy to the new leadership team. Like Jesus, Sister Lena has never met a stranger. She is always at home at the Jersey shore, has a fondness for the Yankees, and loves to dance.

A river of deep spirituality and quiet joy run through the life of Sister Marie Mueller, OP. She is an extraordinarily gifted woman, very capable of doing a variety of ministries. In addition to her teaching and administrative positions in our Dominican academies and grade schools, Sister Marie was associate professor of mathematics and vice president of student affairs at Caldwell University. She also served the congregation, first, as vocation director and, later, as candidate director. She recently served on the chapter planning committee and as a member of the Universe and Creation Committee and study group.

Sister Marie earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and religious studies from Caldwell University, a master’s in mathematics from St. Louis University, St. Louis, MO, and a master’s in pastoral counseling from Iona College, New Rochelle, NY. Her mathematical mind is balanced with her creativity in crafts, puzzles, and projects that she takes on with ease.

One of her former colleagues describes her well, “Sister Marie was always a welcoming, rational, calming spirit within the halls of Lacordaire. She was the one who was calm, cool, and collected, as well as the ear that listened to all of our crazy stories and ideas. She was full of sage advice, always a team player, and an out and out supporter of all our endeavors.” Loved by students, parents, and teachers alike, she will be dearly missed at Lacordaire Academy where she not only was registrar and taught math, but also did the scheduling each year and moderated the quilting club.

No place is too far for Sister Marie to travel to visit family, friends, or community members. She loves the adventure and, over the years, has taken her students on many educational tours, the last being Iceland. Her fidelity to God, family, friendship, and community are at the core of Marie’s life. She is someone who is totally reliable and can always be counted on for help. Her gracious manner, her incredible generosity, and her counseling skills will be deeply appreciated by all in her new work on the leadership team.

Each of the above sisters embodies the servant leadership of Christ. As they share their gifts together with the prayerful support of their sisters, may they be graced with wisdom, understanding, perseverance, and love. ■
Sister Elizabeth Michael Boyle, OP, a graduate of Caldwell University received her master’s in English from Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, and her doctorate of philosophy and literature from Drew University, Madison, NJ. For more than half her lifetime, Sister was an English professor at Caldwell University where her brilliant teaching inspired generations of learners. A published author and poet, Sister Elizabeth Michael today shares her unique poetry with the Tower Poets, a group of women and men who meet monthly to share and critique each other’s creations. She has served on the leadership team for the community and acted as communications director. Her other teaching assignments brought her to Union Catholic High School, Scotch Plains; St. John the Evangelist, Jersey City; St. Mary High School, Rutherford; and Saint Michael, Union. In her earlier years, she wrote and directed plays for elementary school children, delighting audiences every time. Sister Elizabeth Michael has also been a very active member of the Dominican Institute for the Arts and has been honored with the Fra Angelico award for one of her books of poetry.

Sister Ines Marie DiBonaventura, OP, earned her first degree from Caldwell University and her master’s in administration in religious education from LaSalle University, Philadelphia, PA. A kind and amiable person, Sister served in two parishes as pastoral associate: Holy Rosary, Edgewater, and Saint Mary, Rutherford. At St. Mary High School, Rutherford, she ministered as a teacher as well as vice principal. She also taught at Saint Brigid, North Bergen, and Sacred Heart, Dover; and was principal at Saint Catherine of Siena, Cedar Grove. Her beautiful singing voice and her love of music called her to work with the school choir. Currently, she resides at Saint Catherine Healthcare Center, Caldwell, and enjoys reading and music. Her joyful spirit and lovely voice have graced many lives.

Sister Carmel Livolsi, OP, a graduate of Caldwell University, received her master’s in religious studies from Providence College, Providence, RI. Currently, Sister resides at Saint Catherine Healthcare Center and is known as a very prayerful and joyful preacher of God’s Word. She lives with a grateful and happy heart, always ending her conversation with the words “I’ve had a good life, thank God.” For many years Sister Carmel served the Archdiocese of Newark as missions coordinator for the Propagation of the Faith and also as associate director of vocations. Sister Carmel also worked in campus ministry at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. Her mission discipleship brought her to teach at Saint Paul, Irvington; Saint Aedan, Jersey City; Saint Philomena, Livingston; Saint Catherine, Elizabeth; as well as other assignments in New Jersey.

Sister Rita Calabrese, OP, earned her first degree from Caldwell University and her master’s in business administration from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. Her astute business and financial skills brought her to many places. Her last assignment was volunteering at Saint Dominic Academy, Jersey City. She served as financial consultant and business manager at Saint Joseph School for the Blind in Jersey City. She was treasurer of the New Community Corporation in Newark and worked in the Archdiocesan Schools Office as assistant superintendent of secondary school for finance. Previously, she served as a business officer and assistant to the treasurer at Caldwell University and served as treasurer at Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell. No one knows how many pencils she has worn out in her lifetime working with finances or how many board members learned from her to interpret financial reports. In her early years as a Dominican, Sister Rita taught at Saint Mary School in Rutherford. A faithful visitor of those who are sick, she always brings her smile and her willingness to help in anyway needed.

Sister Mary Ann Brezina, OP, received her bachelor’s degree from Caldwell University. She earned two masters, one in science from Montclair State University, Montclair, and the second in botany from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NB. Her many talents brought her to a variety of positions and places. At Saint Dominic Academy, Jersey City she served as plant manager as well as teacher. At Saint Catherine Healthcare Center, Caldwell, she served as administrative assistant. At her alma mater, Caldwell University, Sister Mary Ann was director of food services and also an instructor. At Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Newark, she was an urban garden teacher. Her other teaching experiences brought her to Mount Saint Dominic Academy Caldwell; Union Catholic High School, Scotch Plains; Saint Peter and Paul, Hoboken; and many other assignments. Traveling with family has always been a delight for Sister Mary Ann. A lover of trees and plants, Sister Mary Ann is a member of the Arbor Day Foundation and is currently a gardener at Sacred Heart Convent, Caldwell, and a healer of house plants.
Sister Mary Immaculate McGovern, OP, a graduate of Caldwell University, received her master’s in music from Catholic University of America, Washington, DC. For many years, Sister’s joy was in teaching music to the little ones at Small Blessings School, Lyndhurst. She was also a teacher at Sacred Heart, Lyndhurst. For the Congregation, Sister Mary Immaculate served as director of novices and also did patient care at Saint Catherine Healthcare Center. She often directed the music at congregational celebrations. And at her alma mater, Caldwell University, she was an instructor in music. Additionally, she taught at the following schools: Lacordaire Academy, Upper Montclair; Saint Dominic Academy, Jersey City; Union Catholic High School, Scotch Plains; Saint Aloysius, Caldwell; and at St. John the Apostle, Clark. Wherever Sister Mary Immaculate was assigned or lived or went, she brought her joyful spirit, willing heart, and smiling face.

Sister Barbara Moore, OP, a graduate of Caldwell University, received a master’s in library science from Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, and a master’s in pastoral ministry from Aquinas Institute, St. Louis, MO. She also holds a doctor of ministry from Drew University, Madison, NJ. She was a professor of theology at Caldwell University and held the position of acting dean of students as well as coordinator for graduate pastoral ministry. Previously, she served as chaplain at Rutgers University, Newark, and as principal at Mount Saint Dominic Academy Caldwell and at Saint Aedan School, Jersey City. Among her other assignments were librarian and teacher at St. Mary High School, Rutherford and teacher at Saint Mary, Rahway; Blessed Sacrament, Roseland; and other assignments in New Jersey. A very creative photographer and dabbler in watercolors, Sister Barbara has graciously offered her works to be displayed at Sacred Heart Convent, as well as at Saint Catherine of Siena Healthcare Center.

Sister Thomas Marie Morris, OP, received her first degree from Caldwell University and her master’s in religious studies from Providence College, Providence, RI. Sister currently ministers as pastoral associate at Saint Cecilia Parish, Englewood, where she is beloved by parishioners for her fidelity, dedication, and prayerfulness. She served as administrative assistant in both Saint Mary School, Dumont, and at the Hope Pregnancy Resource Center in Paramus. At Caldwell University she brought business skills to the office of the treasurer. Her expert teaching brought her to Saint Cecelia High School, Englewood; Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell; Saint Dominic Academy, Jersey City; and Saint Aloysius, Caldwell. Sister is a sports enthusiast and, unknown to many, she is an avid runner and has participated in many marathons.

Sister Ann O’Rourke, OP, graduated from Saint Peter’s University, Jersey City, and received her master’s in theology from Providence College, Providence, RI. She received a second master’s in social work and counseling from Fordham University, Bronx, NY. Sister Ann was a counselor at Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell, and was a social worker at Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in Jersey City. She served as pastoral associate at Saint Elizabeth, Linden, and at Saint Mary, Rahway, where she also was director of religious education. At Saint Theresa, Kenilworth, she was coordinator of religious education as well as a teacher there. She also taught at Saint Joseph, West Orange; Mount Saint Dominic Grade School, Caldwell; Saint Elizabeth, Linden; Saint Philomena, Livingston; as well as other assignments in Connecticut. Sister Ann’s dedicated care of her sister over the years often overflowed to other residents of Marian Manor.

Sister Elise Redmerski, OP, received her bachelor’s degree from Caldwell University and her master’s in religious studies from Villanova University, PA. She is a brilliant pastoral associate at Our Lady of Sorrows, Jersey City, a culturally diverse inner city parish, where it is her joy and privilege to serve. Sister Elise is a gifted preacher proclaiming the good news online and in the parish. Previously, she ministered as councilor on the leadership team for the Congregation. Her other ministries include principal at her alma mater, St. John the Baptist, Jersey City, and teacher at Saint Mary, Rutherford; Saint Ann, Newark; Saint Mary, Rahway; Our Lady of the Lake, Verona; and many other assignments. An inspirational liturgist, Sister Elise has generously shared her exceptional gifts with the parish, the community, and beyond. Her health never impedes the time spent on administration, liturgical planning, and integrating prayer services to the moment at hand.

Sister Joan Spingler, OP, received her first degree from Caldwell University and her master’s in administration from Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT. She ministered with a loving heart in the areas of social service at Cusack Care Center, Jersey City; Villa Marie Claire, Saddle River; Siena Village, Wayne; and Saint Catherine Healthcare Center, Caldwell. At Saint Joseph Home, Jersey City, she was resident supervisor and at New Community Corporation, Newark, purchasing agent and social services. She taught at a number of schools including Saint Dominic Academy, Jersey City, where she also served as director of students and was vice principal. In addition she served as a teacher in the following schools: St. John the Apostle, Clark; Saint Theresa, Kenilworth; Saint Catherine, Elizabeth; Nativity, Midland Park; and Saint Mary, Rutherford. In addition, she used her administrative skills as principal at both Saint Brigid, North Bergen and Christ the King, Hillside.
Sister Carol Van Billiard, OP, received her bachelor’s degree from Caldwell University and her master’s in French from Assumption University, Worcester, Massachusetts. In her earlier years, Sister taught first grade at three different grade schools and then French at her alma mater, Saint Dominic Academy. Since 1988, she has served as director of volunteers at Hudson Hospice, Jersey City, where she recruits, trains, and supervises volunteers who visit terminally ill patients throughout Hudson County. An excellent writer and preacher, she enjoys being part of Our Lady of Sorrows church family. For many years she also served as co-coordinator of our associates and later as sister advisor. Other teaching assignments brought her to Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell; Saint Catherine, Elizabeth; Our Lady of the Lake, Verona; and Saint Mary, Rahway. Sister Carol’s loving heart is open to all people and all creation, especially, dogs and cats.

Sister Mary Elizabeth Fallon, OP, graduated from Caldwell University; received a master’s in general professional education at Seton Hall University, South Orange; and a master’s in religion from Saint Michael’s College, Colchester, VT. In preparation for her last ministry, she retooled herself and studied Spanish in order to be able to serve the people at the Saint Joseph Social Service Center, Elizabeth. Previously, she taught religion, served as campus minister, and department chair at Saint Dominic Academy, Jersey City. She taught at Union Catholic High School, Scotch Plains; Our Lady of Lourdes, Mountainside; Our Lady of the Lake, Verona; Saint Mary, Rutherford; and at Lacordaire, Upper Montclair, where she served as department chair and teacher. Sister Mary is a member of the Commission on Global Issues and chairs the committee on immigration. She has a caring heart, which reaches out to those living on the margins. She has traveled widely, is an avid reader, and a movie lover.

Sister Jeanne Goyette, OP, holds a bachelor’s degree from Caldwell University and a master’s in biological science from Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. She currently serves as director of earth ministry for the Congregation as well as coordinator of the Universe and Creation Committee. Sister Jeanne loves cooking and often offers her services as coordinator of barbecues and holiday celebrations at Sacred Heart Convent. Previously Sister Jeanne ministered as vocation director for the community and also did patient care at Saint Catherine of Siena Healthcare Center. She used her love for science by teaching at Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell; Lacordaire Academy, Upper Montclair; Christ the King, Hillside; Our Lady of the Lake, Verona; Saint Aloysius, Caldwell; and other assignments in New Jersey and Alabama. She used her spiritual gifts as a chaplain at Rutgers University, New Brunswick; as pastoral associate at Saint Aedan and Saint Mary, Jersey City. For several years, she was the director of the Wellspring Reflection Center in Newark. A lover of Earth, Sister Jeanne is the master gardener at Sacred Heart Convent and also serves on the town’s environmental committee.

Sister Marge Jaros, OP, earned a bachelor’s degree from Caldwell University and a master’s in elementary childhood education from Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT. For the past two years, Sister Marge was a wellness coordinator at Saint Catherine Healthcare Center, Caldwell. Previously, she had served as vocation director and councilor for the Congregation. For many years, she was director of social services at Marian Manor, Caldwell, a senior residence where she delighted the residents with parties and celebrations at every imaginable holiday. She also became known as the queen of field trips and never missed taking the residents to shows at the Papermill Playhouse in Millburn and on bus rides to various out-of-state destinations. At Saint Philomena, Livingston, she was a pastoral associate and at Saint Ann, Newark, she worked in pastoral ministry and administration. She had a spent a number of years at the House of Prayer in Convent Station as a staff member. In her earlier years she taught at Saint Barnabas, Jersey City; Nativity, Midland Park; and St. John the Apostle, Clark. Sister Marge serves on the Universe and Creation committee and is also a member of its study group. Wherever she is in life, she brings kindness, love, and joy to all.

Sister Elaine Keenan, OP, a graduate of Caldwell University, received a master’s degree in counselor of education from Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. She currently serves as archivist for the Congregation, graciously preserving our life histories. She also gladly serves as the community formation representative to the Collaborative Dominican Novitiate and, previously, served as the assistant vocation director for the Congregation. Her various ministries brought her to Caldwell University where she served as vice president and dean of student life and to the Academy of Saint Elizabeth, Convent Station, as library/service program director. In Sacred Heart Parish, Jersey City, she ministered with a pastoral and caring heart as pastoral associate and served on the evangelization team. At Lacordaire Academy, Upper Montclair, Sister Elaine both taught and ministered as guidance counselor. Her dedicated teaching skills brought her to many other ministries including Saint Thomas More, Fairfield; Mount Saint Dominic Grade School, Caldwell; Saint Joseph, Union City; Saint Aloysius, Caldwell; and other assignments in New York.
Sister Mary Patricia Reid, OP, earned a bachelor’s degree from Caldwell University and a master’s in art-ceramics from Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI. Her life has been made visible on an artist’s canvas, at a potter’s wheel, in a bustling classroom. She brought her creative energy to many schools in New Jersey including Aquinas Academy, Livingston; Marylawn of the Oranges, South Orange; Saint Mary, Rutherford; Saint Matthew, Ridgefield; Lacordaire Academy, Upper Montclair; Saint Theresa, Kenilworth; and to Genesis Farm. An active member of the Dominican Institute for the Arts, she has graciously served the board of directors and the gathering planning commissions. Her history of volunteer work includes New York City soup kitchens, summer camps in three different states, farm labor, catering, migrant ministry with Haitians and Mexicans in the Carolinas and most recently with those seeking asylum in Arizona. Sister Mary Pat is also an active member of the Universe and Creation committee and its study group.

Sister Ann Marie Rimmer, OP, a graduate of Caldwell University, received a master’s in systemic theology from Immaculate Conception Seminary, South Orange. For the Congregation, she was councilor, then major superior. For 13 years, Sister Ann Marie was an innovative program director at Stella Maris Retreat Center in Long Branch, NJ. A pastoral minister at Saint Philomena, she also taught in the parish school. She was both principal and financial director at Link School, Newark. In addition, she brought her creative teaching skills to the following schools: Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell; Saint Mary, Rutherford; Holy Spirit, Union; Saints Peter and Paul, Hoboken; as well as other assignments. Expanding her vision of a worldwide church, in 1989, Sister traveled to Ngara, Tanzania, ministering to Rwandan refugees. This led to working for the main headquarters of the Jesuit refugee team in Rome. With a team of women religious, she also visited Iraq and the Czech Republic to support the emerging underground church. An avid reader and spiritual seeker, Sister Ann Marie also offers spiritual direction and leads workshops at our Lumen Center.

Sister Catherine Waters, OP, graduated from Caldwell University, received a master’s and a doctorate of philosophy in counseling education from Fordham University, Bronx, NY. A true community woman, Sister Catherine has graciously served as a wellness coordinator for Saint Catherine Healthcare Center for the last two years. At Caldwell University, she brought her counseling skills as she served as director of counseling services and also taught graduate programs in counseling psychology. At St. Vincent Academy, Newark, she was consulting psychologist and at Seton Hall University, South Orange, she served as director of counseling services. Sister Catherine taught at the following schools: Saint John the Evangelist, Jersey City; Nativity, Midland Park; and Union Catholic High School, Scotch Plains, where she also was a counselor. Sister is a longtime and active member of the Universe and Creation committee. She also traveled to Iraq to offer support and to learn from our Dominican sisters there. She brings her kindness, generosity, and quick wit to every situation.

Sister Frances Sullivan, OP, received her first degree in education from Caldwell University and earned a master’s in religious studies from LaSalle University, Philadelphia, PA. Interestingly, Sister Fran has spent thirty-seven years at Mount Saint Dominic Academy: 4 years as a student, 15 years as a teacher and director of student activities, and 22 years as head of school. Steadfast in her dedication and with the help of the board of trustees and donors, Sister Fran has moved Mount Saint Dominic forward in many areas including technology, transforming the gym into a beautiful theater, and building a new athletic center. Most importantly, perhaps, is the high standard of education she holds for students and teachers alike. For a time she was director of postulants and affiliates for the Congregation. At Saint Philomena in Livingston, she not only taught religion, but was religion coordinator, and also served as vice principal. In addition, Sister taught at Mount Saint Dominic Grade School in Caldwell and Saint Venantius in Orange. She continues the legacy of Mother Catharine Muth and graciously meets every challenge during these times of pandemic and change.

Sister Patricia Tully, OP, earned a bachelor of science from Caldwell University and received a master’s in early childhood education from Marywood University, Scranton, PA. She received a second master’s in administration and supervision from Saint Peter’s University in Jersey City. Sister Patricia’s nurturing spirit was evidenced in her work with the very young and in giving of her spare time to do patient care in Saint Catherine Healthcare Center. She currently teaches religious studies at Mount Saint Dominic Academy and serves as moderator of Kind Hearts, a service that reaches out to spread joy, for example, creating decorations for nursing homes and making sandwiches for soup kitchens. Sister Patricia has also taught at Lacordaire Academy, Upper Montclair; Saint Matthew, Ridgefield; Saint Elizabeth, Linden; and Saint Aedan, Jersey City. In addition, she served as vice principal at Notre Dame Interparochial School in Ridgefield. Her creativity shines through in her various creations using needlepoint.

*States are only indicated when assignments are outside of New Jersey.*
Sister Margaret Virginia Blum, OP, died peacefully on Holy Saturday, April 11, 2020, in Saint Catherine of Siena Convent having been a member of the Sisters of Saint Dominic for eighty years. Born in California in 1921, she grew up in Rutherford, NJ, graduated from Saint Mary’s High School and in 1939 entered the first freshman class of Caldwell University.

Subsequent education included a BA in social studies from Caldwell University, an MA in American and European history from Seton Hall University, and post-graduate study in history, history teaching, and constitutional law under grants from Dayton University, Northwestern University, and The New School of New York.

Sister Margaret Virginia’s active ministry, from 1941-1999, was evenly divided between education and financial development administration, all in NJ. At the elementary level, she taught from grades 1-8 in Jersey City, Irvington, Paterson, and Clark; at the secondary level, she taught in Saint Mary’s Rutherford and chaired the department of history in Union Catholic High School, Scotch Plains. Her responsibilities in administration included grants and corporate relations at Caldwell University, alumni at Saint Dominic Academy, treasurer and grants director at Mount Saint Dominic Academy.

Sister Margaret Virginia was an outstanding teacher. She never let anyone forget that her first students included university president and prioress, Sister Patrice. All former students remember her history classes as “an unforgettable experience.” Her fiercely partisan engagement sustained an atmosphere of excitement, of predictable unpredictability. Her approach to everything: involve as many people as you can. Both alumni and faculty from Union Catholic High School remember her best as the “director and producer” of the Democratic National Nominating Convention for which classes were suspended to enable every single student and teacher to participate. For anyone who ever lived or worked with her, it is impossible to picture Peggy “resting in peace.”

A conventional sister’s published obituary does not encourage a sui-generis profile. In quarantine from the ritual of shared remembrance in which to express our sense of corporate loss, we simply say: “You will be missed, Peggy. You were one-of-a-kind!”

Sister Jeanne Adrienne Kierce, OP, was a woman of faith and courage. She was warm, friendly, and outgoing—with an impish smile, and had a sense of humor that drew people to her, especially the young. Sister Jeanne was an avid reader, a great storyteller who participated in book clubs, and loved going to movies—followed by a bite to eat. Sister Jeanne treasured her community, family, friends, and co-workers.

Possessed with leadership qualities, Sister could see both sides of an issue and honored people’s viewpoints. Among her many accomplishments, she served her Dominican community on the leadership council, was a school administrator, a classroom teacher, and took on many roles at Marian Manor. In her retirement years, Sister Jeanne served as school librarian, teacher assistant, after-care supervisor, and all-around, hands-on person. She was generous with time and talent.

Sister Jeanne seldom turned down an invitation to go out. Her hat and coat always available! She loved sports and her favorite, the Mets. She knew every player, their backgrounds and potential, usually hitting the nail on the head.

A woman of prayer, with rosaries in hand, Jeanne interceded for family, friends, and many causes. She was faithful to sending notes, cards, and making phone calls. As a Dominican, she preached the word by the way she lived. She is missed and we are blessed for having known her.

Sister Clarita Mayer, OP, was a unique and faithful Dominican. She had a quiet wisdom, a wonderful sense of humor, and many talents that touched the lives of so many people. The sisters who lived with her found her to be kind, thoughtful, and helpful.

When we say unique, Sister Clarita had gifts very few sisters possess. She could fix anything. She would wear her tool belt around her waist and do repairs wherever they were needed. She actually built a bookcase for a sister who needed one. In addition, she could not only sow seeds, but also could sew and knit. In her years at St. Catherine’s Convent, Sister Clarita was helpful in altering habits and mending whatever needed to be repaired. Her nieces...
and nephews loved their annual Christmas stockings, handmade ornaments, baby blankets and outfits as new life came into the family.

In her ministry of teaching, Sister Clarita was loved by her students. They recognized in her a sincere, well prepared, and kind teacher. She cared about her students and they knew it.

Sister Clarita was dedicated to the Right to Life movement. On many Saturdays, at various Right to Life gatherings, she would say her rosary to pray that life would be spared. Although somewhat reticent to speak in public, she called in to a popular Sunday morning radio program, Religion on the Line, speaking to thousands of people about her conviction that all life was precious and should be protected. In addition she was an animator of Couples for Christ, an international Catholic organization. The New Jersey chapter met at St. Catherine’s to pray and discuss ways their marriages and families could be strengthened in their dedication to Christ and in serving the poor. Those in the group recognized her holiness and commitment to Christ and valued her leadership.

Sister Clarita sowed many seeds in her 67 years as a Caldwell Dominican. She touched the lives of the sisters she lived with, her students, the adults who revered her and couldn’t do enough for her when she needed help. At one point in her ministry, Sister Clarita lived in one town and ministered in the next. Since she didn’t drive, she needed rides to her ministry and home again at the end of the day. A particularly dedicated group of women and men drove her each day to and from her ministry. They counted themselves blessed to be in her presence.

Sister Clarita, your sisters, family, and friends know you are already with God. Continue to sow your seeds, especially, at this time in the history of our country, and in our world.

Sister Dolores Procassini, OP, a member of our congregation for 70 years, died peacefully at Saint Catherine of Siena Healthcare Center on March 28, 2020 at the age of 89. Sister Dolores exemplified generosity in life and unending gratitude learned from her parents, Nicholas and Angeline (Forte) Procassini.

Sister earned her BS in social studies and English from Caldwell University, an MA in Spanish from Notre Dame University, IN, and an MA in pastoral ministry and spirituality from St. Michael College, VT.

In her ministry as teacher, pastoral associate, and program supervisor, Sister Dolores brought the message of God’s never-failing love to countless children and adults. She was a devoted teacher in many NJ schools: Saint Mary, Rutherford; St. Elizabeth, Linden; Holy Spirit, Asbury Park; Saint Catherine, Elizabeth; Saint John the Apostle, Clark; Saint Dominic Academy, Jersey City; Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell; Bayley-Ellard, Madison; and Paramus Catholic, Paramus. She also taught at Blessed Sacrament, Bridgeport, CT. As a pastoral associate, Sister ministered at Mount Carmel parish, Nutley and Saint Anthony Claret parish, Lakewood.

In addition, Sister Dolores served as a program supervisor for Catholic Community Services for the Archdiocese of Newark.

Many memories and stories about Sister Dolores remain among us. Some recall she played the drums in high school. Maybe that explains her love for jazzy music coming from her radio! We knew she was a terrific cook and loved putting around the house. But did we know she learned culinary skills from her parents and their restaurant? Oh, yes, she taught Spanish. But did we know that when our college tried weekend classes, although she could not be there on weekends due to other responsibilities, Sister Dolores made cassette tapes for her students (about 15 or so!) They, in turn, each responded by tape and sent them back to her—all in Spanish! A pioneer in distance-learning! Then when a young, inexperienced priest was named head of school where she taught, she mentored him to be successful at this challenging assignment. All while, teaching Spanish and typing classes! When a high school girl found to be pregnant faced ostracism at school, Sister Dolores whipped up an appropriate wardrobe for her, using her sewing skills to preach the gospel of compassion.

There were also trips to Oklahoma where she served on the Board of Las Casas, a Dominican project in the service of Native Americans. What a passion she had for these people! How the people in the Bloomfield senior housing building she lived in loved her and how she looked out for each of them too! Finally we hear the story of the man who unwittingly took her seat in chapel on Saturdays, at Saint Anthony Claret parish, Lakewood. He moved to let her be there and asked afterward why that seat was important for her. “I push the button to open the door for the eucharistic ministers,” she replied. A simple service, almost unnoticed! Helping Christ go to those in need.

Now Sister Dolores meets Jesus in person and hears his words, “As long as you did it for one of the least, you did it to me. Come, share in the banquet prepared for you, Sister Dolores!” A button pressed. A person...
admitted! Sister Dolores, keep pressing those buttons for us too, we pray, that we can bring the presence of Christ to others.

Sister Shaun Sheflott, OP, a member of our congregation for 67 years died peacefully at St. Catherine of Siena Healthcare Center on March 9, 2020, at the age of 97. Sister was widely educated, earning a BS in child psychology from St. Joseph College, CT, an MA in elementary education and reading from the University of Connecticut, and a MS in religious studies and scripture from Providence College, RI.

Sister Shaun made a difference in the lives of countless children in her ministries in the classroom and in religious education. She taught in the following NJ schools: Saint Aloysius, Caldwell; Saint Philip, Clifton; Mount Saint Dominic Academy, Caldwell; Holy Spirit, Asbury Park; Saint Valentine, Orange; Saint Thomas, Fairfield; and Saint Mary, Rahway. In Alabama, she taught at Saint Catherine, Mobile, and Saint Margaret, Bayou La Batre. Sister Shaun served as director of religious education at Saint Peter, Parsippany; St. Pius X, Montville; Saint Aloysius, Caldwell; Saint Joseph, Bogota; Saint Matthew, Ridgefield; and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Nutley, all in NJ. She exemplified the gospel message to love one another as God loved her.

As the community gathered for her funeral rites, we received messages from people with whom she had worked years ago, recalling her positive impact on their lives! We all shared memories of this dear sister. Many thought that none of us really knew her well, but as the remembrances were spoken, we realized that indeed, we did know her!

Sister Shaun loved looking well dressed even in the years she had to use a wheelchair. Those pastel suits and matching blouses announced her spirit of beauty! A poet, Sister Shaun loved the ocean. On trips to Spring Lake for a week, she would ride up to Ocean Grove, notebook in hand, and spend hours on the boardwalk. Writing poetry? Praying? She never said. Other times she would hop the bus to Atlantic City and come home with her purse filled with winnings!

Sister Shaun moved about 29 times in her lifetime. Moving brings its own kind of sufferings, but she did it for the sake of the mission!

Most of us do not pray in iambic pentameter, or tetrameter. But we found in her notebooks, prayer poems revealing Shaun’s lovely soul and her relationship with God. One reveals how she bore the suffering in her own life. She wrote:

Close to the heart of Jesus, close to the heart of light
Close to the word of mercy, close to his strength and might
Close to the seat of wisdom…
Follow the path of justice, walk in the path of pain
True wisdom is attained when one remains
Close to the heart of Jesus

As we mourn her presence among us, we hear her voice echoing that prayer, urging us to stay ever closer to the heart of Jesus.

Sister Francis Margaret Smith, OP, entered the Sisters of St Dominic of Caldwell on September 8, 1958. In her heart that day she was probably praying, “Here I am, Lord, I come to do you will.” Throughout her life Sister Francis Margaret was involved in many different ministries. A gifted seamstress, she was an apprentice to Sister Gerard during her postulancy and novitiate days learning to make habits.

Once professed, Sister Francis Margaret responded to God’s call to be a teacher of little ones. Her soft caring manner was a perfect fit. A few years later, she was asked to serve our sick sisters by cooking in both the old and new infirmaries for six years under the direction of Sister Ann Dominic. She then returned to teaching the little ones, followed by a brief stint as house mother at Maryglenn Home for Girls. Can’t you see her listening intently to the concerns of the girls?

In 1991 Sister Francis Margaret again said, “Here I am Lord,” and this time it was a call to become a missionary for three years in Marsh Harbor, Abaco, Bahamas. In addition to teaching, she used her gifts helping the people acquire life skills in sewing and cooking. Returning from Abaco, Sister returned to Caldwell and spent the rest of her ministry as a helper in our community sponsored works.

On the occasion of her Golden Jubilee, Sister Francis Margaret was asked, “What has been the biggest surprise in your Dominican life and mission?” Her answer was, “My biggest surprise was I have served in so many different ministries.” This statement is so true when we reflect on Francis Margaret’s life as a Dominican of Caldwell.

On May 4, 2020, Sister Francis Margaret answered the call for the last time, “Here I am Lord,” and ran into the loving arms of the God she loved so well.
To all our Healthcare Staff

Thank You!

For the sacrifices you have made during this pandemic. Your dedication, commitment and courage deserve our deepest gratitude and admiration.

Contributors: Raj Aitwal, Maria Cianci, Donna Ciangio, OP, Mary McGuinness, OP, Marie Mueller, OP, Gerarda Panek, OP, Ann Marie Rimmer, OP, Patricia Tavis, OP