A Toast...

to our dear Sr. Wilhelmina!

70 years in vows

March 9, 2014

90 years old!

April 13, 2014
Dear Family, Friends and Benefactors,

We are thrilled to present to you this special newsletter celebrating our very dear Sister Wilhelmina as we honor her 90 fruitful years of life, with persevering fidelity to religious vows for 70 of those years. Our community has been blessed beyond measure by her faithfulness and example since our foundation in 1995. We ask you to join us in thanking the good God for Sister's beautiful life and example to so many, but most especially to this little community who loves her so dearly. Ad multos annos Sister Wilhelmina!

Mary wrote a letter of petition at the age of 13 while attending John Marshall but was told to finish high school. She was valedictorian of St. Joseph's High School for Negroes Class of 1941.

Mary was a girl, thirteen years old, and I would like to become a nun. I plan to come to your convent as soon as possible! I will graduate from grade school next month. That I want to know is whether you have to bring anything to the convent and if at it you have to bring clothes. I hope I shall not trouble you, my dear sister; I have only one idea, becoming a nun. Of course I am a Catholic. God bless you and those under your command.

Respectfully,

Mary Elizabeth Lancaster, age nine

Early Years: 1924-1941

Although my family was materially poor and I had grown up in a segregated world, I did not feel myself to be disadvantaged in the least. Our wealth was our Roman Catholic faith. The Faith had come down to me from my mother's side of the family. One of my maternal great-grandmothers, Mary Madden, had been a slave. When Mary became Catholic, her owner freed her and her young son. "I cannot keep you in slavery any longer," he told her. "Since you are now baptized, that would be like keeping Christ in slavery." My father was the first convert that my mother helped to make. Before her death in 1986, she had helped to make at least a hundred more.

Mary standing at back right, with neighborhood playmates in St. Louis. Her mother's family moved there from Georgia for the support of a Catholic community.
Formation and Teaching: 1941–1962

Sr. Wilhelmina was encouraged by her pastor, Fr. William Markoe, to pursue her vocation. Blood brothers and Jesuit priests John and William Markoe were passionate precursors of the Civil Rights movement. Sr. Wilhelmina received her religious name in honor of her beloved pastor, who directed many young women to the Oblates Sisters of Providence.

Saturday Prayer

Sweet Lady, thanks for all your care for us! You’ve been so good- we have no right to fuss- Yet we entreat thee not to think us grown And reach out all on our own.

We are thy babes, in diapers not in silk; We’re but newborn and howling for thy milk; Nay! We are in thy womb, frail seed, unborn: Oh, bear us Christlike some bright winter morn!

Circa 1944

Above Right: Sr. Wilhelmina’s earliest known poem. She has filled many notebooks with her poetry since!

Right: Sr. Wilhelmina at her typewriter shortly after her First Profession.

Below: 6th and 7th grade at Christ the King in Baltimore.
Back to School and Further Teaching:  
1962-1972

“Fourth grade was my favorite. I mostly taught fourth grade. I don’t think I was a good teacher, but I was determined about what I wanted from the students.”

Sr. Wilhelmina in the habit which saved her life. The stiff guimpe deflected a knife hurled at her by a troubled adolescent while teaching in Baltimore.

Notre Dame of Maryland (above) where Sister received her Bachelor of Arts in 1966. Sister majored in History, and excelled in Library skills, subjects that would aid her in her future role as archivist. She took additional courses at Webster College, Mount St. Agnes (left) and St. Louis University.

St. Francis Xavier in Miami, Sister’s last teaching assignment.

Sister at the end of her teaching career, having served in the Archdioceses of Baltimore, Washington, Charleston, St. Louis, Philadelphia and Miami.

One of Sister’s many grateful students.

Sr. Wilhelmina (seated, far right) and her “band” for their 25th anniversary of vows, 1969.

Photo courtesy of OSP Archives
“In 1973 I was appointed archivist of the Oblate community, and also appointed extraordinary secretary to the General Chapter of 1973. My fourteen-year stint as archivist ended in December 1985, when I was appointed to assist Sister Mary Benigna Holland in the Mount Providence Center of Music and General Culture. I enjoyed working there, right up to that day in May 1995 that I departed for my new life with the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles. Leaving Sister Benigna, and all the rest of my fellow oblates, was like leaving home a second time. They, like my parents and family, made me what I am today. I have many good memories of them, especially those early years when holy silence, much communal prayer, communal spiritual reading, and wearing the habit were still important, and practiced by all.”

Sr. Wilhelmina at her typewriter in the archives, 1976.

Sr. Wilhelmina with her community at the Motherhouse, July 1979.

As archivist, Sister assisted researchers such as Fr. Michael Curley, CSSR in the writing of the Life of St. John Neumann.

Sr. Wilhelmina visits her mother, Ella Therese Lancaster, in St. Louis, 1982.

Sr. Wilhelmina aids a Sister in the music room.
Dear millionaire! I pray for you
That when you come to die,
Your soul may rise in joy and peace
To mansions great on high:
Partly because you always did
All that our Father willed,
Like giving us money
Sorely needed to build!

All saints in heaven have reached there
Because of Jesus Christ
Who mercifully, lovingly,
His body sacrificed. -2005

“We would seem I’ve done a very foolish thing. After fifty years as an Oblate Sister of Providence I am starting religious life anew as the foundress of a new community affiliated with the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. To those who say that my leaving my old community to found a new one doesn’t make sense, I reply that it is understandable only in the light of faith. When other people came, I welcomed them because I wanted to share what I had. The disciples were persevering together in prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus. This is a perfect description of the religious sisterhood that has formed.”
With fellow Missourian, Sr. Tarcisia, shortly after the move to Kansas City

Still young at heart!

Left: Sister Wilhelmina of the Most Holy Rosary celebrates her feast in Kansas City.

“It is our charism to pray for priests, all priests everywhere, especially those who are hunted, hated, and persecuted, just like Our Lord was. It is my joy each day to post the name of a priest on the crucifix that hangs in our refectory. We pray for that priest all that day.”

Be Sure of This

Dear suffering, frustrated priest,
I want to tell you that
Though mixed with water, trodden on,
Salt never does go flat;
Just as a city on a hill
Cannot be hid at all,
The Word of God, like thunder,
Must in every valley fall.
Although the hearers stop their ears
And much prefer to spat,
They can be positively sure
That salt does not go flat.

Sr. Wilhelmina lovingly embraces Mother Cecilia on her appointment as Prioress in 2010.

For recreations, Sister has been composing poems and left blanks for the community to guess.

Sr. Wilhelmina in a skit on St. Elizabeth of Hungary this Christmas.

We are so thankful for Sister’s fidelity!

Home Again in Missouri: 2007–Present
March 9th  
Anniversary Celebration

Several Sisters composed poems to have Sister Wilhelmina fill in the blanks!

“We trust in the mercy of God. Oh, I’m grateful to be here! I’m so grateful to be here! I’m grateful to be alive and to serve Him in this community. I’m praying for Mother Cecilia. If there is anything I would want to pass on to the community, it would be this: Devotion to Our Blessed Mother, True Devotion to Our Blessed Mother.”

WORK DAY 2014

The chicken coop gets a face lift!

The Christ the King Shrine is stabilized with a concrete base.

A new path cut to our pasture, just in time for the our newest arrival, “Quinta.” She is the fifth member of our little herd.

A culvert is put in place underground to catch run off from the hill, diverting it to our pond instead of the barn!

Special thanks to Jim and Kristyn Schuh for organizing!

Thanks to our dear families, friends and neighbors!
“That in all things God may be glorified” 
(Rule of St. Benedict)

Sr. Wilhelmina’s 4th grade class at St. Pius V, 1967