



A new day,

By Marian McAvoy SL

On the road to Jubilee 2012

From 1970 to 1990 . . .

- A new form of governance
- Focus on justice and peace
- A mission begins in Ghana

Editor's Note: *In our series of articles on the Sisters of Loretto's Journey to Jubilee 1812-2012, we have examined segments of our history in chronological order to show the community's origins, growth, mission, and evolution from the early 19th into the 21st century. The period represented in this article — 1970 through 1990 — was a time of tremendous change. The rule that had governed the Loretto Community until the Vatican II years began to change rapidly afterward, and the sisters faced difficult personal and religious challenges.*

Perhaps the most fundamental change had to do with the way the sisters governed themselves. From their 1812 founding until the mid-1960s a group of elected and appointed sisters would meet in private to decide on Loretto business: everything from the purpose and direction of the order to matters of finance, new building and development, teaching assignments, individual ministries, and the routine of daily living and worship. After Vatican II, the Sisters of Loretto were invited to participate openly in shared decision making, to choose how and where they would serve the community and carry out its mission.

Education for children had always been Loretto's primary mission, but that began to change. Many different missions were now considered, and issues of justice and peace emerged as a strong focus. Their presence in Ghana also began during this time. It echoed the community's long history of traveling into new territories, even foreign countries, to educate children in need. With this edition, we explore Loretto's new form of governance, the new emphasis on justice and peace, and the mission to Ghana, West Africa.

In 1986 when Mary Florence Wolff SL was working in the Loretto Archives, she produced a unique history of Loretto entitled *History Sampler*. She described it as “a limited number of important happenings” set against and within the same time frame as . . . “historic events in the nation and the world.” For example, in 1968, the year that Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., were assassinated, she lists this history-changing event for Loretto: “Sisters begin making personal choices of apostolate . . .”

After Vatican II in the mid-1960s the sisters could now make personal choices about how and where they would serve Loretto. This opportunity and responsibility for choice of ministry was a new dimension in members' lives. But choice and change did not come easily for everyone. Some members found it very difficult to make decisions within the context of community.

Although truly an historic change, Loretto Community members were not totally unprepared. Loretto's leader during the 1960s, Mary Luke Tobin SL — known as Mother General or Mother Superior before and during Vatican II — was an eager learner who always found ways to share her new insights and information with those around her. The writings of current thinkers were often sent to the community with the request that they be read and discussed in community meetings. Directly involved in Vatican II, Sister Luke moved quickly to begin Loretto's response in the Special Chapters of 1967-69. By the end of the decade with the adoption of *I Am the Way* as its new constitution, Loretto began the '70s within a totally new government structure.

Education continued to be the choice for the majority of members, although there were new arenas within that category: from teacher to librarian, from principal to parent education, from teaching in a parish school to religious education for the parish, from teaching in Loretto colleges to black colleges in the South. Loretto members chose to teach adults in a variety of programs and settings. Pastoral ministry, a variation in education, was also chosen by a large number. The fact that many members were interested in choosing work in health services became a gift to our Loretto retirement centers and infirmary.

Political and social concerns motivated some choices, such as moving to Washington, D.C. to work for a senator. Loretto members were soon working “outside Loretto” for groups that shared Loretto's values, for example: Head Start, Catholic

a new way

Worker, Church Women United, American Friends Service Committee, National Council of Churches, United Nations, United Farm Workers. A geographic view would indicate the result of new choices being made either for educational purposes or for a new ministry. A map of the world revealed a Loretto presence in many new sections of the United States as well as beyond — in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Switzerland, Japan, England, and several nations of Africa and Central and South America.

Two of Loretto's greatest leaders, Luke Tobin and Helen Sanders, were close friends and strong collaborators in bringing the Vatican II renewal to solid foundation within Loretto. Their elections to leadership, only six years apart, illustrate the great shift in community decision making. The body of Loretto members that brought Luke into office in 1964 were those previously appointed as superiors of community convents and those serving in elected or appointed positions in government. At that time, the sessions were completely closed from all other non-members. When Helen was chosen to be president in 1970, the electors were representatives of the total community, which had been divided into 10 blocs according to age in the community. Each bloc elected four members, bringing the total number of assembly delegates to 40. Completely closed sessions of Loretto decision makers were now history.

Loretto continues on its way to learn how to take hold of decision making, both on the personal as well as the communal level, in ways and on issues that exemplify the basic themes of Vatican Council documents . . .

The Church as the people of God; the primary importance and dignity of the individual person; the responsibility of that person for his or her participation and decision making within the total community; a listening to the griefs and anxieties of the world's people; the practice of inclusiveness and the extension of the boundaries of the church to include all Christians and also those of other world faiths.

Sister Augusta Neal, SND, *From Nuns to Sisters: An Expanding Vocation*, (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990, p. 49).

Excerpted from Marian McAvoy SL in her chapter "Taking Hold of Decision Making Personally, Communally," for the upcoming book *Century of Change, a publication initiated by Patricia Jean Manion SL and planned for release during Loretto's 2012 Jubilee Year.*

1633 — 1812

**Catholics Settle in Colonial America;
Loretto Story Begins**

1812 — 1830

**Loretto Foundation and Early Days;
Moving Beyond Kentucky**

1830 — 1900

**Education Mission Expands;
Loretto Pushes Westward**

1900 — 1960

**Education Efforts Diversify;
First Loretto Infirmary Opens
1923: Loretto in China**

1960 — 1970

**Decade of Renewal;
Loretto Studies Guidelines, Governance
1960: Loretto in Latin America**

1970 — 1990

**New Government Structure;
Loretto Works for Justice/Peace
1989: Loretto in Ghana**

1990 — 2000

**Co-membership Continues to Flourish;
Loretto and Ecological Awareness**

2000 — 2012

**Loretto Leadership Expands;
Sister Communities Embrace
2009: Loretto in Pakistan**

2012

Loretto Celebrates 200th Jubilee!

Justice and Peace 1970-1990 “We Work for Justice and Act for Peace”

By Mary Catherine Rabbitt SL

One aspect of the new government structure adopted by the Sisters of Loretto in 1970 was the division of responsibilities between “line” and “staff.” Sister Helen Sanders, the first “President” of the Sisters of Loretto (previously the head of the order was known as the Mother Superior) hired a staff of community members to serve in various capacities. One of those positions was that of “Social Advocate,” a position formally created and adopted by the Loretto General Assembly in 1972. Barbara Roche SL of St. Louis served as the first Social Advocate from 1972-1975.

In 1975, President Helen Sanders SL chose Mary Catherine Rabbitt SL to serve as Social Advocate. She remained in that position until 1980. She was joined by Agnes Ann Schum in 1979, who continued for several years in that capacity. Mary Peter Bruce SL later served as Justice and Peace Coordinator during the presidencies of Marian McAvoy SL and Maureen McCormack SL. At present, Marie Ego SL serves as Justice and Peace Coordinator. She has held that position since 2005.

Whether the person is called “Social Advocate” or “Justice and Peace Coordinator,” the mission is the same: “to work for justice and act for peace because the gospel urges us.” (*I Am The Way*, 36). The particular issues addressed by that person have changed with the changing needs of society and the Loretto Community, but the mission remains the same: to challenge each member to work for justice and act for peace and to represent the communal efforts of Loretto in carrying out that mission.

Marie edits the *Justice and Peace Newsletter*, which is published 10 times a year. It goes to the Loretto Community with the *Interchange* mailing, and is available via e-mail. The newsletter covers current justice and peace issues throughout the nation, and is not solely focused on Loretto activities in this area.

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Journey
to
Jubilee
1812-2012



Photos from Ghana by Marie Ego SL.

Blessed Trinity Leadership Academy,
Akokoamong, Ghana, West Africa

Loretto begins work in Ghana, West Africa

By Marie Ego SL

A school now stands where before there was none, and 80 poor children in a small, isolated town have new learning opportunities they never had before. This is one of the tangible fruits of the Sisters of Loretto's labor in the vineyard of Ghana, an equatorial nation in sub-Saharan West Africa. The school was built in the town of Akokoamong, in a very poor area outside of Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana, to serve those who do not have access to quality education. It has the capacity to educate 700 children, and the goal is for the student census to grow. The school came about as a joint effort between the Sisters of Loretto and the African order of the Daughters of the Blessed Trinity (known as the FST Sisters). The seeds of the "sister" relationship between the two religious orders began nearly 20 years ago.

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Left: Main street Akokoamong.
Below right: Downtown Akokoamong.

Cathy and I landed in Ghana early in 1987 for a three-week teaching ministry. Our first impressions of Ghana were of a very colorful, friendly people in a tropical climate we came to call “Africa hot.” Green, growing things were everywhere, and very large. Elephant grass grows 12 to 18 feet tall. The trees were giants, many more than 200 feet tall or as tall as the sequoias in the American northwest. The lush green of the “bush” was a contrast to Colorado, New Mexico, and the dry, sometimes snowy, Southwest where I had been living. Ghanaians thought that a daytime temperature of 80 degrees was “cold like in your country,” and cause for bundling up.

How did Loretto come to Ghana?

When I was in fourth grade I did a project on Africa. I can still see the picture I made to go with the project. It was of a young boy standing by a one-room mud house with a thatched roof. Africa intrigued me from that time on, but I never thought of traveling there. Many years later I was a Sister of Loretto living with another sister, Mary Jane Hummel SL, whose sibling was a Medical Mission Sister working in Ghana at that time. When I met Mary Jane’s sister Ellen, we chatted for awhile about her work in Africa. Then she suggested that I come to Ghana for three to five years, and I blurted out, “Oh, NO!” . . . then meekly added, “Not for three to five years!” When she asked “how long?” I knew in my heart of hearts that I would be going to Ghana. Before long I was on the way with Catherine Mueller SL, a friend and Sister of Loretto.

Ghanaian children who would like to go to school but can't because their families are not able to afford the school fees.



We returned to Ghana again the following year where we continued to teach workshops for a variety of sisters, priests, and lay people. On this second trip to Ghana the two of us traveled to several towns and presented workshops in many different settings. At the end of our travels I responded to invitations to come live in Ghana and lead workshops in counseling, psychology and communication. The Loretto Africa Project thus began.

From the start, involvement of other Loretto members was crucial to Loretto’s mission in Ghana. Many wonderful visitors came, taught, and returned to the United States. The community members who came added a wonderful sense of Loretto in all we did. Sister Rose Colley and co-member Susanne Terry went to Ghana in 1988 to do consulting work. Sister Pat Kenoyer moved to Ghana where she worked as a psychologist for almost two years. I decided to move to Ghana and to live with Medical Mission Sisters at the hospital in Berekum, about seven hours drive from Accra, the capital where planes came and went. In the early 1990s Sister Pauline Albin came for a couple of months and then came back to teach in a secondary school with Sisters of Divine Providence. Later she worked for the diocese of Sunyani until 2010. She, too, had always been pulled toward Africa as a young person.

In the mid-1990s Pauline and I began to explore the possibility of forming a “sister” relationship with an indigenous Ghanaian community, the Daughters of the Most Blessed Trinity (FST). Like Loretto’s beginnings in the U.S., the FSTs did not have sisters outside of the country of origin. The process went slowly as neither group knew what it would mean to form a sister community. Then the committee of FST and Loretto Sisters in Ghana suggested that we build

a school together. The ideas went back and forth, and finally a grant from the Hilton Fund for Sisters, a foundation that has generously given grants to Sisters of Loretto and other women religious since 1986 gave us the necessary boost. The seeds were planted for Blessed Trinity Leadership Academy, which opened and was dedicated in 2009.

Pauline and I lived in Ghana for 18 years. Over those years, many more sisters and Loretto co-members came to Ghana to work with the people doing short-term teaching or workshops; there were more than 20 Loretto community members in all from 1987 through 2010. I moved back to America in 2005, and Pauline repatriated in 2010.

Both of us had spent almost two decades in Ghana and have left a part of our hearts there with the wonderful people we met along the way. There was a pervading sense of God in the people and culture. With smiles and laughter the people showed their generosity. The kind of generosity that comes from poverty, sharing what little they had, and living each day with a strong sense family and community.

On the plane home I was in tears remembering all the wonderful people I'd met whose lives touched mine. I was missing them and wondering whether I'd ever seen them again. I especially miss the two children named after me. The Ghanaian Marie Egos are now 17 years old; one is in high school and the other lives in a remote area and probably will never have the opportunity for education beyond primary school.

So many sensory memories of Ghana flooded over me as the plane rose high above the African coastline. I had loved the little town of Berekum. Splashes of color everywhere, the taste of the fresh fruit and roasted nuts, the fresh peanut butter in big washbasins. The sound of the drums at night, all night long. The funerals were occasions for singing . . . a haunting sound of flute and voice. The flute played the melody, and the singer — for awhile it would be one, then another took over. They would sing about the departed person, things like, “She was kind and generous to everyone.” Or, “He was strong, and his farm was the best in the area.” Little phrases to honor the dead person.

Although I was not sure I would ever return when I first left Ghana, I did return again. I spent time with Pauline, the Medical Mission Sisters and friends. We were joined by Mary Ann Gleason SL (who currently works in Uganda) and Lydia Peña SL from Denver in November



One of two baby girls named for Marie Ego SL. This Marie is now 17 years old.

2009 for the dedication and opening celebration of Blessed Trinity Leadership Academy in Akokoamong.

Although the staffing and daily operation of the school is now carried out by the Sisters of the Blessed Trinity, the hope is that the Loretto community will provide consultants, teachers, and support people to help the Academy go forward. In fact, a group of high school students from Loretto schools, St. Mary's in Denver and Nerinx Hall in St. Louis, already went to the school in July 2009. They painted classroom walls with alphabet pictures, which were greatly appreciated by the young students. The school now is moving right along with more than 80 students, and more are ready when there are scholarships for them.

We hope and pray for a continued variety of connections with the FST Sisters and the school in Ghana. Education — along with the hopes, capabilities and dreams it fosters — has always been a priority for Loretto.

