

# Keeping in Touch

SSHJM



August 2022



<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
A word from the editor	5
Golden Jubilee photos	6
The Blitz destruction in Rotherhithe	10
Knock July 2022 - Sister Elizabeth Mooney	17
Diamond Jubilees in Cork	20
Platinum Jubilee and Diamond Jubilee in Chigwell	22
Sister St. Pius receives the Fideliter Serviente Award	24
The Sisters in Uganda	26
Volunteer Spotlight - Sister Kathleen Lavery	28
A thank you from HM Queen Elizabeth II	30
Sister Christine Hawkins RIP Personal Vocation Reflection	32
A great big Thank you from the Jubilarians	36





## A Word from the Editor

*The summer is over in Europe and the rains are expected soon in Zambia, at least that is the general climatic plan, but the climate seems to be telling us other things and extremes now appear to be the norm. We are reminded when seeing the awful floods in Pakistan that our stewardship of the earth is sadly lacking and we are called to respond in whatever way we possibly can.*

*Here we have celebrated life and Jubilees — in Ireland with Sisters Laurentia and Brigid Finn celebrating 60 years of Religious Life. Sister Elizabeth Francis who is in the same group celebrated here in Chigwell with Sister Maria Goretti who celebrated her Platinum Jubilee. The 28th of August was the big Golden Jubilee of Sisters Elizabeth Mooney and Edith Woods and Chigwell was at it's best welcoming Family, friends and sisters who all enjoyed the opportunity to meet up and spend time 'remembering when'.*

*Another celebration was held in Uganda where Sister Mary Costello was presented with an award to recognise her many years of work in Development, in the same article the sisters update us on their farming expertise in Mukono.*

*In this edition we continue with the penultimate part of the story of the fire in Rotherhithe in 1940. And there is a particularly lovely personal vocation reflection, written by Sister Christine Hawkins RIP who entered Chigwell during one of those terrible air-raids.*

*Sister St. Pius who is in a care Home receives from the Diocese the Fideliter Serviente Award for her many years of dedication.*

*Next, I am struggling with the Calendar for 2023 and still waiting for some good photos please.*

*With love and prayers*

Anne



BISHOP ALAN FROM BRENTWOOD JOINED US AS THE CELEBRANT FOR THE DAY AND WAS DELIGHTED TO PRESENT THE SISTERS WITH A PAPAL BLESSING. BOTH ELIZABETH AND EDITH HAD THEIR FAMILIES VISITING, FLYING OVER FROM IRELAND AND COMING DOWN ON THE TRAIN FROM SCOTLAND.









SISTER EDITH ADMIRING THE BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS.

SISTER CATHERINE KENNEDY AND MANY OTHER SISTERS AND FRIENDS FROM ZAMBIA AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES JOINED ELIZABETH AND EDITH TO CELEBRATE THE GREAT DAY.



SISTERS LYNN, ANNE G. SIOBHAN, KATHLEEN, EDITH AND ANNIE MARY. OPPOSITE; SISTERS MARY CATHIE, ELIZABETH B. AND JANET ENJOYING LUNCH

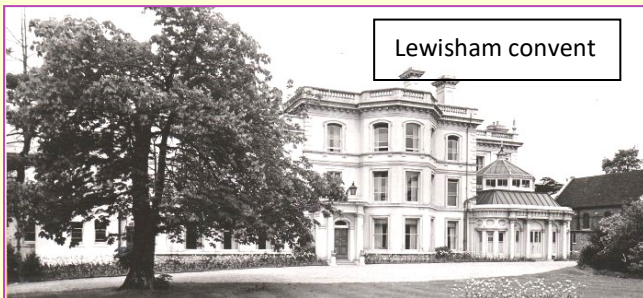




# The blitz destruction of the church of Our Lady Immaculate, The Convent and St. Pelagia's Home, 654 Rotherhithe Street, London SE 16

## Part Three

On Tuesday, Reverend Mother General very kindly sent her car to Lewisham for Mother Hilda and me to come to see her. She told us to bring Mother John, Sister Paula



Lewisham convent

and Sister Ernestine with us. These sisters she kindly kept in Chigwell. Reverend Mother General, Mother Antonia, Mother Lucy, Mother Rosalie and all the community received us most kindly and very sincerely condoled with us. Rev. Mother General then gave me further instructions to send Mother Monica to Barrhead with some of the old Mount Vernon (Edinburgh) girls, also to send two old ladies to the Little Sisters of the Poor.

On Tuesday night the raids continued, and much damage was done. Bombs were dropped all



St Mary's Convent and Home, Barrhead

over our grounds, but thank God, nothing happened to the property or to us.

On Wednesday, Sister Mechtilde went with me to see the London County Council authorities to try to persuade them to give us some clothing for the girls. Here we met with much red tape again. After much ado, they promised us that two visitors would be sent to the convent to see the girls and make full inquiries. Alas! They never came. We then went to purchase some woollen clothing for the sisters. Owing to the warm weather they had been wearing

very light apparel. Now the long nights in the basement had become so very cold that they were feeling the change intensely. We found great difficulty in getting woollens. However, we succeeded in getting a small supply, which we shared as far as possible.

Wednesday afternoon, I sent Miss Russell to take a young girl home to her parents in Dulwich. They had only reached the town of Lewisham when they got caught in an air-raid. They ran to a shelter but, when about to enter, something made Miss Russell change her mind and she did not go in. They ran to another shelter further on. Thank God for this as the former shelter got a direct hit and was completely demolished. Much damage was done that afternoon to the town of Lewisham. Whilst this raid was going on, I had a presentiment that something had happened. After the "All-clear" Miss Russell and Muriel returned both weeping and in a very exhausted condition. It was with great difficulty that they were able to relate what had happened. Sister Mechtilde and another girl were also in town at the same time on a message. For them we also feared the worst, but they had gone into a private house, and also were saved, thank God. The raid continued that Wednesday evening. As night came on it became more intense and more dangerous. It seemed though it were meant for us entirely. A shelter outside the convent gate was hit and two old ladies were killed. The shelter itself was completely destroyed. The gas and water mains were both hit and were badly damaged. A large tree near the convent was rooted up and thrown high up on to another tree. Delayed action bombs were dropped on the road outside the convent. This part of the road was rendered impassable, and the convent avenue had to be used by pedestrians and car drivers. The plate-glass windows in all the front rooms of the convent were broken and our supply of water and gas completely gone. Thank God, we were all safe, but on that morning, we were completely exhausted.

Owing to the number already at St. Teresa's, the shelter was full and hence, not to overcrowd it, we went to the basement room of the new building for shelter. During that Wednesday night raid some of the windows in this room got broken, and the gas main, having been injured, the gas came right into the



room where we were. It was suffocating, and we were forced to turn face downwards. We thought it was a gas attack and none of us had our gas masks. Having inhaled the gas until the raid stopped at about 7am, we all felt really ill. After Mass I told Mother Hilda that I could not remain another night. Poor Mother Hilda, she too seemed worn out. She agreed that all should leave for "Great Holt". I had much to see to, so immediately after breakfast, Sister Kevina and I went out to purchase clothing and other necessities for the girls. We



Sister Kevina

tried in vain to get a means of conveyance to take the two old ladies to the Little Sisters of the Poor. So many were evacuating that it was impossible. We succeeded, however, in getting much shopping done, and so made the girls look respectable again. We made another attempt to get a conveyance, going as far as Greenwich. There we called on Father Redmond. When he heard of the destruction of the church and the convent he was deeply grieved. He and his curate, Father McKenna, brought us by car to Lewis, the Coach people. They could not help us that day but promised to come early on Friday morning. Father Redmond and Father McKenna brought us safely back by car to the convent, where we found Mother Hilda, her sisters, chaplain, staff and girls all ready to set off. The chaplain had to take the Blessed Sacrament away with him. How it grieved me to see the Blessed Sacrament taken away again. The one thing that grieves me most in life is to be left without the Blessed Sacrament. Thank God, it was not for long this time.

I was anxious to get Mother Monica and her girls away that evening, if possible, also the two old ladies. So, after vespers and Rosary, I set out again with one of the girls in the hope of getting a car. After two hours search, the "Alert" sounded, and we made haste for St. Teresa's as quickly as ever we could.

Sister Kevina, Emily Sadler and I had missed our confession, being out when the confessor came on Wednesday, we decided to go over to Greenwich, as it

was not too far, to get Absolution from our Extraordinary Confessor. Just then, Rev. Canon Monk called to see us and asked for Mother Hilda. We told him that they had all gone and that the Rev. father Chaplain had taken away the Blessed Sacrament for safety. He was deeply moved and tried to persuade us to remain. I told him how very sorry I was but felt I could not remain. I then phoned Rev. Mother General, asking her if we might go to "Great Holt" (Dockenfield in Surrey). She gave permission but asked how we were going to manage for sleeping accommodation. I said: we must only sleep on the floor or anywhere. She sympathised with us and expressed her deep sorrow at our terrible plight. I then phoned our Doctor in Rotherhithe, asking him if he could take the two old ladies to the Little Sisters of the Poor. He willingly agreed but said he must come very early, owing to the raids. We then went off to confession. After confession, our friend, Mr. O'Mahoney, came to speak to us. He was overjoyed to see us, and so were we to see him alive. "Thank God", he said, "you are all safe. Our people were going to take you all on Saturday evening to the school in Keeton's Road, Bermondsey, where they took two hundred people from 'Down Town'. These people were only in the school when it got a direct hit from a bomb, and they were all killed instantly. Oh, how good God had been to us. How he had preserved and watched over us all the time. We can never thank him sufficiently. Poor Mr. O'Mahoney's own house had been bomb damaged, but fortunately no one was in it at the time. He and his wife had taken rooms in Greenwich and since then we have had no news of him.

That night again the bombing was terrible and several times we thought the shelter was hit. Next morning, we found a large piece of a bomb at the door of the shelter.

Dr. and Mrs. Clough arrived as arranged and took the two old ladies to the Little Sisters of the Poor. They had scarcely gone when another raid took place. However, thank God, they were able to reach the convent and left the two old ladies there safely. Lewis' coach arrived shortly after 8 am to take Mother Monica and her six girls to Euston. I went with them to get their tickets and see them safely off. We had only reached Brockley when another raid took place.



Typical car of the 1930's and 40's

We continued for a little when the driver asked what he was to do. I said, "I leave it to you". He said, "we are supposed to take shelter when a raid is in progress." "alright", I said, "stop the bus". We had only got into the shelter when a bomb dropped and demolished

two houses. We remained in the shelter, reciting rosary after rosary, whilst the raid continued for four hours. The Lewisham car brought us back to Lewisham. We were only back when the "all-clear" sounded. We had a hasty meal and set out again for Euston Station, which we reached safely this time, thank God. When I got their tickets, I had to leave them. It was only 3 p.m. and the train was not due to leave until 9.15 p.m. What a long wait for them. It was the afternoon of the next day before they reached Barrhead.

On our way home, Sister Gabriel and I had only reached Peckham when the "alert" sounded. We were near the Peckham Monastery, and the Fathers had a shelter in the crypt, where we remained for a short time until the "all-clear" sounded. We made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and got back to the main road. It was very difficult to get a means of conveyance. We waited for more than an hour and finally had to make our way through a crowd into a tram. We had to stand all the way to Lewisham town. As we left the tram the "alert" sounded. We asked a passing car to take us up. They very kindly did so and left us at the door of the convent.

This Friday evening, we were in for an intense raid: it lasted all through the night until 7 a.m. We prayed as we never prayed before. And repeated often a special prayer to "OUR LADY QUEEN OF ANGELS FOR PROTECTION".

A benefactor wrote to me at Christmas, not knowing of our calamity and enquiring if we were safe. She thanked God that she and her sister were still safe, and she attributed their safety to this very prayer and enclosed a copy. During the early part of the summer of 1940, I distributed some thousands of

copies of this prayer. I hope others have experienced the same protection.

How we thanked God on Saturday morning when we were still alive. We now numbered five Sisters. Sister Mechtilde had left us the previous morning for Sudbury. She got caught in a raid and had to take shelter for four hours, but finally she reached Sudbury.

Soon after 8 a.m. two coaches arrived to take us to "Great Holt".

Thank God to get away from London. We had not got out of London when the "alert" sounded again. The driver continued and we kept praying all the time. All signposts being gone, we had difficulty in finding our way. We called at the Good Shepherd Convent, Windlesham, and left seven girls there. Reverend Mother and the Sisters were very kind to us. The poor girls wept bitterly when we were leaving them. It was all very painful, but we had to bear up and give thanks to God for having spared us. Sister Mary Gabriel was still with us but had to go to our convent at Hambledon (Mount Olivet). As we arrived at Ash, we called to see the

Parish Priest,  
Reverend Father  
Healy, a great friend  
of ours. He was  
deeply moved when  
he heard of our  
great distress. He  
wanted us to have

lunch, but we  
begged to be

excused. He insisted on our having a cup of tea. He also got refreshments



This is a much earlier photo  
of our home in Sudbury.



Open Air School, Mount Olivet  
in Surrey.

An hour's rest" on the terrace. St. Dominic's Open-air School, Mount Olivet,  
Hambledon, Surrey.

for the drivers – as he said to soften them and prevent their grumbling at being detained. He took out a large tin of biscuits to the girls and told them to take a “fistful” each. He asked them if they knew the meaning of a “fistful”. This gave them a laugh. He left the biscuits with them and told them to finish them. He then took sister Mary Gabriel to Hambledon in his car. We were then only ten miles from “Great Holt”. We were now thirty in number – four Sisters and twenty-six girls This was a large number to intrude on Mother Hilda, who was already overcrowded in her Evacuation Home. How I disliked the thought of this intrusion. It was the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and the octave day of our leaving Rotherhithe. How much had taken place in that fatal week.

Mother Hilda and her Sisters gave us a most warm welcome and set to work to provide beds etc. One of the workrooms was generously given up to the girls. They were provided with beds and made very comfortable. I assure you they were very grateful and very glad to be away from London. We were made very comfortable in the convent. The girls’ room served also as a workroom and dining room during the day.

We were very glad when it was time to go to bed. It was the first time I had undressed from Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup>. Next day, Sunday, was the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was ordered in all the churches and chapels for peace. We tried to make up in prayer on this Sunday. Many enemy ‘planes were put out of action that day, thanks to the prayers of the Faithful throughout the world.

For the next three weeks, the three sisters with the girls who could do needlework, were kept busy making outfits for the girls.

The next and ultimate part of Sister Adelaide’s history will be continued in our next edition.

## Knock July 2022.



After my visit to Zambia (I will soon write a short account on the wonders of that visit) I went to Ireland for a holiday on 17<sup>th</sup> July. As I had not made my retreat, I tried many places to get one but with no success. So, I decided to make the Jesuit retreat at Knock. That meant I once again I enjoyed the wonderful hospitality of our community at Knock. Thank you, Sisters.

The 6-day Ignatian retreat was led by Fr Ashley Evans SJ. and it was also possible to join via the internet. There are few retreat places as suitable to make a retreat as Knock. The prayerful atmosphere and the constant presence of people following the spiritual exercises either individually or as family is inspiring. It also gives me hope that the Catholic faith is still very much an integral part of life for the Irish family; young and old were there each day.

The day began with an input by Fr Ashley in the Basilica which was very thought provoking. He had taken St Paul's letter to the Romans as the point of reference for the retreat. In his input he crisscrossed scripture old and New Testaments and St Paul's letters etc. which was daunting at first to follow but he finished each session with one or two points to ponder on. The many quotations were displayed which was an immense help.

Fr Ashley had spent many years on the missions, and he used his experiences to



illustrate his point at hand.

*Once he was asked by his parish priest to fill in for him as he was taking a day off. Fr Ashley did not have any lectures at the college that day so there was no problem. Just as he was going to have a siesta, he was informed that a funeral had come into the church. He was not told there was a funeral expected so he was not prepared. As he was not working in the parish he felt at a loss. Quickly he found out who had died and a little history of the person. He was an elderly man who loved the church but was sad that most of his family had become Muslim. He did not reject them; they attended his funeral and Father said, "it was evident they loved him" Father based his talk (which was short as he was not prepared), on the hope of the resurrection. He felt upset at the parish priest for not telling him there was a funeral, but that evening he admitted he had forgotten about it. After a few months the parish priest congratulated him on how well he had officiated at the funeral as three of the man's granddaughters had approached him to be accepted back into the church inspired by the celebration of their grandfather's funeral. They were accomplished musicians, so they quickly became youth leaders and staunch supporters of the parish.*

His conclusion was that we are good at organising funerals, but do we celebrate the hope and glory of the resurrection at funeral times enough to inspire and console the mourners?

One other point he emphasized from the story was the importance of honest communication in building and maintaining relationships. The fact that the parish priest gave Fr Ashley the feedback enabled him to forgive him for not telling him about the funeral and restored his peace of mind and confidence in the parish priest. John O'Donoghue aptly demonstrated the importance for us to communicate/dialogue well to build lifegiving community for our own good.

"When people stay separate and isolated, they stiffen into the act of surviving, whereas when they have a conversation with each other



they begin to live as the artists of their own destiny”

pg. 8 Walking on the Pastures of Wonder

Guided Meditation sessions were available at 16.30 hrs and 20.30 hrs. These sessions took up the theme of the day from the morning input and were conducted in a reflective and prayerful way.

We were privileged on the Tuesday at Knock with a visit from Sr Brieghe Mc Kenna. She spoke to a packed Basilica on the importance of prayer and the necessity of priests and laity to support each other so that the Catholic faith will continue to flourish in Ireland. She was clear it will be a different Church in the future, it will flourish, but deep prayer and honest dialogue is necessary between priests and congregations and at family level for the desired change to evolve. As we all know she is a fine Sister, she is celebrating her Diamond Jubilee this year.

The morning I left Knock a Bishop from Portland diocese in Canada said Mass at the shrine. His mother immigrated from the area one hundred years ago and he comes on pilgrimage with people from his diocese each year to ask Our lady of Knock to protect and guide them. He pointed out Knock is the only shrine of Our Lady that includes the Lamb of God which makes it a very special shrine.

We are privileged to have the shrine in Ireland, but you must be prepared if you visit Knock to experience the fresh and often blustery, wet climate of Western Ireland. So go prepared. I was fortunate this year as Knock, like the rest of Ireland, was bathed in glorious sunshine while I was there.

*Sister Elizabeth Mooney*





SISTERS BRIGID FINN AND  
LAURENTIA CELEBRATE WITH  
THEIR COMMUNITY IN CORK  
AND THEIR FAMILIES.





# Congratulations



THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD GOD IS ON ME,  
BECAUSE THE LORD HAS ANOINTED ME  
TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.



SISTER MARIA GORETTI AND SISTER ELIZABETH FRANCIS CELEBRATED THEIR PLATINUM AND DIAMOND JUBILEES IN CHIGWELL AND ANOTHER WONDERFUL DAY WAS ENJOYED BY ALL OF US PRESENT. SISTERS JOINED US FROM SEVERAL COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURS OF SR ELIZABETH FRANCIS CAME ALONG TO CELEBRATE ALSO.







Congratulations

Thank you



# SISTER ST. PIUS RECEIVES AN AWARD FOR HER LONG SERVICE TO THE DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK.



Recently Sister Pius was given the Fideliter Serviente Award for her work for the priests in Blackheath and Lewisham. Fideliter Serviente means 'Faithful Servant' and describes perfectly the work that Sister Pius did for many years.

This award is given in recognition of work done for the Diocese of Southwark which is above and beyond the call of duty. Work done voluntarily and behind the scenes.

Sr. Pius spent many years supporting the priests in Lewisham. She cooked meals for the priests in Our Lady Help of Christians Parish in Blackheath. This Parish frequently hosted priests visiting from other countries as well as the resident priests. Sr Pius also cooked their meals for celebrations –

Christmas, Easter, Jubilees etc.

Sister was also very active in the local church of St. Saviour's in Lewisham. When the priests went on holiday Sister Pius was there to make sure everything ran smoothly in their absence.

Sister Pius said she thoroughly enjoyed shopping and cooking for the priests in Blackheath and the work she did in St. Saviours. She was sorry when the time came for her to give it up as her health deteriorated, but she was glad she made that decision and was able to find someone else to do the work.

Below she is pictured with Sister Elizabeth Frances who continues to support Sister Pius and visits her regularly in the Care Home. Sister Pius who has been in a local Care Home in Lewisham due to the Covid pandemic, will hopefully soon transfer to our own Marian House.





## The Sisters in Uganda

Recently Sister Mary Costello was recognised and given an award from the Rotary Club in Uganda, appreciating her contributions towards the development of the country and in particular her work with persons who have special educational



needs. As Sister Mary was unable to travel to Kampala to receive the award, Sister Jane Frances received it on her behalf and then went with it to Pabo. Congratulations Sister Mary and all the Sisters in Uganda for your great work.



Much of the food that the sisters have they grow themselves thanks to the skills of Sister Maria Gorreth and Sister Jane Frances. The sisters who all work in the garden grow bananas, water melons, pumpkins, sugar cane and coffee to mention but a few! Some of the produce goes off to market to support the community and some goes to the community table.

They have two lovely cows, one is called Maria and the other Josephine. They are milked daily by Charles. The sisters employ about five workers to work with

them so it must be a sizable garden.



*Sister Jane Frances and Maria*



*Sister Mary Gorreth and Charles*



After so much hard work there is always a little time for recreation together with the Asspirants, Santrina, Evirin, and Rebecca (who have now moved to Zambia) for the next stage of their formation and Josephine and Anna who are still with the sisters in Mukono .

Sister Annet very kindly sent us these photos and the article. Here in the UK we are eagerly awaiting her arrival for an experience in Field Heath Community and School. ( Visas require a lot of patience).



# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

## SISTER KATHLEEN LAVERTY, SHJM



*My whole life focus is Jesus Christ and to lift people out of poverty.*

Sister Kathleen Lavery felt the first glimmerings of attraction to a life of service at age nine when she was introduced to the dedicated young heroine portrayed in Charlotte Bronte's novel Jane Eyre. Growing up in a large, loving home in Northern Ireland, Sister Kathleen was inspired by the orphan Jane's love and courage in the face of incredible life challenges.

As political upheaval increased in her homeland, Kathleen's parents found it necessary to emigrate from their Irish home to Northern California, joining relatives in the East Bay and embarking on a new life framed by community, generosity, and grace.

Today, more than 50 years since pronouncing her Vows as a Sister of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Sister Kathleen brings her passion for the poor and an incredible depth of medical knowledge and experience to her work at the Order of Malta Clinic of Northern California.

Sister Kathleen's lifelong path of service has taken her throughout the Bay Area and around the globe. Entering the convent after graduation from Richmond High School, she completed her religious and nursing studies in the UK, first at hospitals in England and Wales and subsequently in a Registered Nurse position at Mercy General Hospital in Sacramento. She was then missioned to Zambia's northern province where she served nine years as a midwife during the time of Africa's AIDS crisis. "I was initially reluctant to work with mothers and babies, fearing I did not know enough to care for them safely," she says. "But God not only called me, He accompanied me throughout my time there, a time when many lives were devastated by AIDS and poverty. The gifts of thanks from the people I was privileged to serve were in the form of produce from their gardens and filled me with joy."

Back in California, Sister Kathleen continued her nursing studies at Holy Names University, Oakland, refreshing her knowledge and subsequently sharing her expertise with the Bay Area Black Consortium as AIDS and Maternal Child Case Manager. Her continuing studies served her well in her next posting as a nurse midwife for indigenous families in El Salvador, before a personal crisis brought her back from Latin America to care for her ailing father. In 2005, Sister Kathleen renewed her work within the Bay Area's immigrant communities by joining the nursing team at the St. Anthony's Foundation in San Francisco, her professional home for the next eight years.

In fall of 2020, as the pandemic was ravaging the East Bay's immigrant and homeless residents, Sister Kathleen found the opportunity to become a volunteer RN at the Order of Malta Clinic. "I was

immediately impressed with the depth and scope of care our team is able to provide to our most vulnerable neighbors," she explains. "COVID has made both preventive and emergency medical care for the homeless and working poor even more challenging, but the generosity, perseverance, and courage of the team at the Order of Malta is boundless. I was glad to hear the Clinic will be expanded as it is critical for the Clinic to function at the capacity the community needs."

In addition to her work with the Clinic, Sister Kathleen is a member of the KAIROS Psychology Group team, a nonprofit psychotherapy, assessment, and consultation practice serving clergy, ministry, and vowed personnel in times of personal crisis. She is also active in the CatholicsCare group at the Diocese of Oakland, helping parishioners navigate end-of-life challenges. "Catholicscare.org was formed in response to California's assisted suicide bill," she explains. "The Order of Malta Clinic, with its emphasis on the whole person – mind, body and spirit – will be a crucial local partner."

Enter for God and serve through community are the tenets that have guided Sister Kathleen throughout her career. "My whole life focus is Jesus Christ and to lift people out of poverty," she says. "Gratitude to community and gratitude to God knows no bounds."





CONGRATULATIONS TO  
HER ROYAL MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II  
ON THE OCCASION OF HER PLATINUM JUBILEE

WE (SSHJM), SENT HER A MASS BOUQUET WITH OUR  
CONGRATULATIONS AND RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING  
ACKNOWLEDGMENT FROM HER.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Platinum Jubilee

1952 - 2022

*I send you my grateful thanks for  
your kind message on the occasion  
of the Seventieth Anniversary of my  
Accession to the Throne*

ELIZABETH R

2022



ROYAL MAIL

POSTAGE PAID GB  
W7047

The Sisters in the Congregation  
Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary  
803 Chigwell Road  
Woodford Bridge  
Essex  
IG8 8AU

## SISTER CHRISTINE HAWKIN'S PERSONAL VOCATION REFLECTION

*This was written by Sister Christine many years ago while she was still ministering in California.*

At Baptism, each of us received a call from God, a call to live our lives according to his special plan. I would like to tell you how I experienced my call to be a Sister of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

I certainly cannot say, as many sisters do, that from a very early age I wanted to be a nun. When I was a teenager, especially my junior and Senior years of High School, my ambition was to be a chef, like Julia Child, or a foreign correspondent, but never a teacher. When I left St Mary's High School, where I had boarded with 40 other girls, World War II was in progress. The economy in Ireland was bad. There were seven of us in our family, two boys and five girls. My Dad worked for the local Council. I started to look for a job to help with the housekeeping and to have some pocket money for myself. I managed to get a temporary job in a hair salon selling newspapers, tobacco, cigarettes, matches etc. It was extremely boring. One evening when it was pouring rain and no one was coming into the shop, I began to experiment with smoking. I got so sick that I thought I was going to die. I never tried it again. I would not recommend smoking to anyone! As was the case in Ireland at the time, most people had to leave the Emerald Isle to get work. My heart was set on going to England. My parents did not approve at all.

There were some Sisters in our town of Wexford that I knew very well. These were the St. John of God Sisters and I had got my elementary education from them. I visited their convent quite often and got quite friendly with Mother Paschal who was the Matron in a Nursing Home in Torquay, in Southern England. I told her that I would like to train as a nurse as many of my friends from school had gone to England, trained as nurses and were making good money. There was a great need for nurses because the war was still going on. Mother Paschal spoke to my parents about me accompanying her back to England. She had a friend who was the Matron of St Andrew's Hospital Dollis Hill in London, where there was

training school for nurses. Since my grades were good I would have no problem getting a place in this school. My parents reluctantly agreed.

I lived very happily with the sisters for about six months where I witnessed, first hand, the commitment of the Sisters to the patients and to each other. I admired their dedication to the poor and felt that my life experience would help me fit in with this group of women. I had already been accepted at St Andrew's Hospital for training. All during this time, my only consideration was to be a nurse and not a Sister.

Yet over a period of weeks, I had an increasing interior personal struggle. For me it was the "dark night of the soul". I felt that I needed to be with others; I needed community. I wanted to be a part of a group of people who were committed to one another and to the service of others. I knew that I needed other people to encourage me in spiritual growth and challenge me to continue my personal development. It was through this personal conflict that I realised that the Lord was calling me to serve Him as a Sister of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and not as a lay minister at St Andrew's Hospital. I can still, after 57 years, vividly recall this moment that I knew with startling certainty that I had a religious vocation.

I had an aunt, Sister Theodora, in the congregation. Mother Paschal spoke to her of my desire and personal calling and it was arranged that I go to Chigwell, our Mother House. Sister Theodora told me that I was not to tell anyone of my intention of entering the convent because she predicted that I would be home after three weeks! Yet here I am, 57 years later. I was always very independent and still am. So I set out for Chigwell by myself. When I reached London, there was an air-raid and in the confusion I missed the Sisters who had come to the station to meet me. I took a taxi cab to the convent and when I arrived, I found the whole community were praying for the safety of the new postulant whom the Sisters could not find at the station.

As soon as I stepped inside the door of Chigwell Convent I felt very much at home. I knew in my heart that I had made the right choice. I had deep down inside me that gut feeling that I was in the right place. During supper, the Superior General asked me what kind of work I would like to do. I immediately responded that I would like to cook. When asked about



my experience in cooking I replied that I had none, but that I could always follow the instructions on the carton or packet!

At this time Chigwell convent had been selected as a center for administering the prospective Teachers Examination. This was 3hour test of religious knowledge comprising of one long essay (75%) and fifty multiple choice questions (25%). We were prepared for the examination by Mother Mary Gertrude. She took 45 of us, novices and postulants, every day. I remember her expounding about grace—sanctifying grace, habitual grace and actual grace. To this day I cannot understand or explain Grace! It was one of the essays that I shied away from. I chose to write on a ‘Christian’s Daily Exercise’. I really went to town and wrote reams about it. The results came back in six weeks and everyone did very well. However, I was the only one to get a distinction. The others had chosen to write on Grace. Since this was the work of the Holy Spirit, consequently, I was sent on to train as a teacher. I went to Notre Dame College in Liverpool, the first of our Sisters to attend that college.

I have completed nearly 50 years working in schools, (in California), 16 years as a principal in Turlock and Atwater, 4 years at High School in Watsonville and the remaining years in the classroom in Sacramento, Turlock and Atwater in grades 1-8. I would be the whole night long if I were to recount all the exciting episodes of my teaching career. I am limiting myself to one which stands out in my memory.

My first five years were in Sacred Heart School Turlock where I taught First Grade. There were 50 in the class. I had two brothers, Phillip and Chris. They were below grade level. Their mother was disabled and their father an alcoholic . I paid great attention to these two students and took them on Saturday for extra reading lessons.

At that time, one of the units of the Social Studies curriculum included “The People who Help Us in Our Community”, like the fireman, the doctor the priest, nurse, etc. I would elicit sentences from the children and then write them on the chalk board. Chris’ sentence read something like this: The priest will help us go to heaven when we are dying.

When I returned to Turlock as Principal several years later, Chris was in Hospital.

One day he became very ill and asked to see a priest. Fortunately there was a mission in Turlock and a Redemptorist father went to visit Chris. Because of the highly contagious nature of the disease , they both had to wear masks which limited some of the communication. Father said, “ Chris, I am a priest. You asked to see me?” Chris said, incoherently, “Yes Father, Sister said in the First Grade that you would help me go to heaven”. Chris made his peace with Almighty God and died that evening. The missionary told this story from the pulpit and I was in the congregation. A couple of days later Phillip, his brother, visited me in the school office to thank me for helping his brother get to heaven.

It is impossible for me to cram into a short space the story of my years as Sister. The sacrifices have been minimal, but that does not mean to say that it was easy all the time. It was hard for me to leave Ireland and come to the USA so far away from my family and all that was familiar. It was hard to get used to the hot weather in the San Joaquin Valley wearing a heavy black serge habit with scapular, starched under veils, gimp and a forehead band. Our classes were very large and we had a shortage of teaching materials. We lived in community and sometimes it was bit difficult getting along with all the sisters all of the time. If it were not for my close relationship with Jesus and my prayer life, I would not have been able to survive at times. I thank God that He has always been there to help me when I needed a shoulder to cry on.

There were many blessings, too. Nowhere, but in our congregation, could I have known the dedicated women with whom I have lived. They are extraordinarily gifted women who are at the same time humble and faithful Religious. They are caring women who radiate the Christ within them in their compassionate concern for others. They are joyous women who spread their laughter so that others may share it.

When I have the urge to thank God for the precious gift of my Religious Vocation, I have been tempted to paraphrase two lovely lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

*How shall I thank you - Let me count the ways...*

*But then I would not know where to begin and certainly not know where to stop...*



Sister Maria Goretti sends her sincere thanks to all who sent her greetings, Mass cards and Gifts on the occasion of her Platinum Jubilee. Special thanks to the Chigwell community for arranging a beautiful Mass and followed by a scrumptious meal. Holy Mass will be offered for all your intentions.

Sister Elizabeth Francis also sends her thanks to you all for your prayers greetings. Mass cards and gifts that she received for her Diamond jubilee



Sr. Laurentia and Sr. Brigid;

We were overwhelmed with all the Beautiful cards, gifts, masses, prayers and good wishes as we Celebrated our Diamond Jubilee on the 17.08.2022

Holy mass will be offered for your intention, in gratitude for all your kindness. 60 years serving the Lord in many of our Convents, went so quickly and we praise the Lord for all his blessings to us.



Our dear congregation is daily in our prayers and we are Grateful for all we receive daily – also from our family who

Joined us for the special occasion.



We would also like to thank Sr. Julie Rose, Sr. Annie Mary, Breda and the staff in Sacred Heart Convent Cork, for making the day so special for us.





The Golden Jubilee celebrations here in Chigwell was an event to behold. The warm welcome our families and friends received on arriving here in Chigwell was clear evidence of our hospitality and they were impressed with the celebrations.




The Mass on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> celebrated by Bishop Alan was inspiring, we appreciated his presence. Jason's beautiful music provided a serene celebratory atmosphere and the sanctuary so magnificently decorated with fresh flowers was admired by all present. Then the meal prepared and served by the staff was a feast enjoyed by everyone.


The many Masses and various gifts received has given us great pleasure.

We sincerely thank everyone who made the celebration such a memorable happy event for us, may God bless and reward each.

Mass will be offered for your intentions.

*Sisters Elizabeth and Edith*



**I** there is righteousness  
in the heart, there  
will be beauty in the  
character. If there is  
beauty in the character,  
there will be harmony  
in the home. If there is  
harmony in the home,  
there will be order in  
the nation. If there is  
order in the nation, there  
will be peace in the world.   
So let it be.

*Old  
Scottish  
Blessing*



Editorial Team:  
Sr. Anne Griffin & Sr. Barbara Dundon  
Chigwell Convent,  
803 Chigwell Road,  
Woodford Bridge IG8 8AU  
Tel/Fax: 020 8506 0359  
Email: [communications@sacredheartsjm.org](mailto:communications@sacredheartsjm.org)  
[www.sacredheartsjm.org](http://www.sacredheartsjm.org)

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