Blog
Spirituality



Photos of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange in the Regina Residence hallway in Orange, California (Provided photo)



by Honorine Uwimana

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico.*

Do you ever revisit your old emails to see the conversations you opened your account with? Or maybe the websites you used to visit back in time and question your old interests?

When I first placed my hands on a keyboard and a mouse, my first sites of interest were allposters.com and Correspondants du Monde, websites that had one thing in common: sharing photos.

The internet was a luxury I could only use once a week for 30 minutes. As a 10-year-old kid, I had no cellphone and no laptop, but because I got good grades, I could visit the cybercafé for half an hour every week. All I was interested in was finding people on the other shores of the world through pen pal websites like Correspondants du Monde or finding updated news and pictures of my favorite singers and movie stars.

It was a time when the only TV we watched was the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency's programming, which had a focus on local news. It would also play old French movies and outdated English songs we thought were new. The internet was a new muse reachable by a few.

It was not until I had more regular access to the internet that I discovered all the songs we called new were five or six years old in the West. We started catching up when we were finally tuned to Voice of America and would daily listen to new songs released in the United States. Then, my friends and I would go to allposters.com to see who the artists were and put faces to their lyrics. We wanted to create a familiarity with the songs we liked through the faces behind them.

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For me, it was not enough to listen to a song or write to a person miles away. It was crucial to put a face to their names, conversations, songs.

Later, Facebook and other social-networking spheres had the same idea, creating platforms where people who never met could connect through sharing photos and understand what each other's daily lives might be.

As much as it has always mattered to me to put a face on everything, I have learned mostly about the values I cherish and the habits I want to adopt in my life from

people who live out those virtues. I associate their faces with these values.

Serving at Regina Residence and being a volunteer in Southern California unveiled to me the faces of wholeheartedness, friendship, hope, significance, unconditional love and tenderness.

Wholeheartedness

I see the face of wholeheartedness every day in the people I serve with at Regina Residence. These individuals are ready to do everything and anything so that at the end of the day, everyone at Regina Residence feels loved, valued, healthy and welcomed.

I admire this team, always worried about what is best for everyone and providing care beyond physical health, concerning themselves with the whole person. They make the most of every minute and the best of their talents, gifts, knowledge and resources with enthusiasm and a smile on their faces.



Sr. Margaret Ann Chinchotte, left, and the late Sr. Teresa Dolores Montañez (Provided photo)

Friendship

If I was to draw friendship, give it a shape or a name, it would be a composite of Sr. Margaret Ann Chinchotte and the late Sr. Teresa Dolores Montañez or Sr. Flo Bovy and Sr. Mary Jean Pejza.

These pairs of friends exhale relentless mutual concern, joy, prayer life, support and constant availability, even through tough times. I am so blessed to observe and learn from their companionship, which extends beyond shallow camaraderie and makes them stick together as they get older.

Hope

I have seen hope accused, incarcerated, handcuffed, but it still wore a smile and stood tall with a belief in the future, goodness, humanity and divine mercy.

Social justice being my passion, I have had a chance to visit and spend time with women in prison. These amazing ladies, even faced with an unjust justice, recite their creed as if they still believe in a fair world and a better one to come.

These women who lost their youth or half of their childhood for a stay behind bars still choose to wake up and sit around the altar of the Lord to pray for those who persecute them, believing again that God will have the last say.

For me, that is hope, and I met it in the most desperate place.





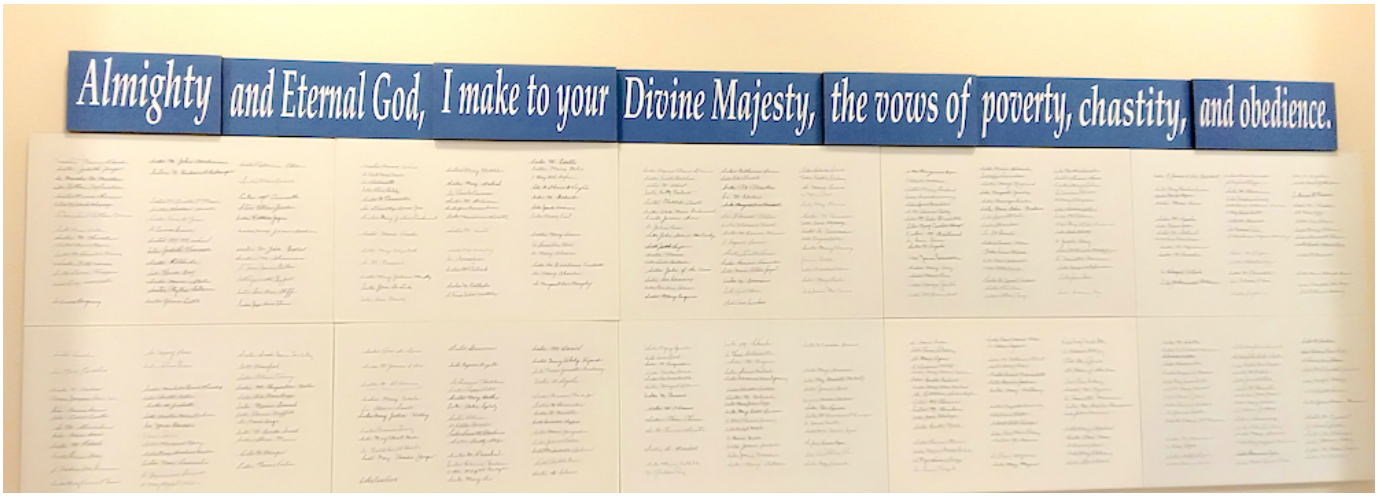
Left: Two of the staff members at Regina Residence in Orange, California; right: Sr. Kathleen McHugh, left, with Denise Gonzalez, one of the CNAs (Provided photos)

Unconditional love

There are people who do random acts of kindness, caring for the elderly and the sick at Regina Residence as if they are caring for their own family members, investing their time and even their break time, when necessary, to make the residents' health conditions better and cheer them up in all ways.

Those are the nurses and caregivers at Regina Residence, young women who already have personal, busy and demanding lives, but who wear compassion, humanity and care every day to address the needs of the population of Regina Residence.

They made me rethink unswerving love as the reason that remains when you have no reason to love.



Regina Residence hallway (Provided photo)

Significance

I meet the faces of significance every day when I walk the halls of Regina Residence.

I see framed photos of women who gave of themselves in times of limited resources, education and infrastructure and raised their voices when a woman's voice was no voice. These religious women built some of the greatest humanitarian setups in Orange County, put others before themselves and addressed situations of crisis around the world during some of the most dangerous moments of history. These arduous women without doubt crossed path with Jesus while living a faithful life devoted to the underserved, unheard, neglected dear neighbor.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, those alive and those who have fulfilled their lifetime on Earth, wear a crown of significance.



The late Sr. Teresa Dolores Montañez, left, with Honorine (Provided photo)

Tenderness

Being 15,000 miles away from my hometown means no familiar visits and only infrequent phone calls and new acquaintances around me, but in the midst of another land, I meet people whose hugs feel like my mother's, people with whom a long conversation feels like talking to my longtime friends or sisters, people whose expression of tenderness sounds and feels like home. Those are the sisters in the memory care unit where I serve.

One of the privileges that came with my role at Regina Residence is to be surrounded by unremitting dedication, tenderness, friendship, significance, hope and unswerving love. I have met in person some of the values I venerate, and my moral and ethical fibers are strengthened every day.

[Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker from Rwanda serving at Regina Residence with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, California.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.