

Living as People of Hope During COVID-19

Sister Anne Marie Liston



Photo: Sister Marie Cooper

An Empty Murphy Field

From our dining room window we have an unobstructed view of Murphy Field with a basketball court across the street. Most days, school hours over, we used to hear the not so steady thump of basketballs. Things have changed a lot since last year when the pandemic began. We are less likely to see teenage players and more likely to see an empty field or young parents giving their children a daily dose of fresh air, walking, or riding tricycles. It is just one of the many visible reminders of the pandemic. We have grieved with those who have lost dear family and friends and pray for an end to this pandemic which has wrought such havoc on our earth.

While the struggles and problems wrought by the pandemic color our lives, fill our TV screens, and worry our hearts, we have to keep reminding ourselves that God is with us through it all. Even in the midst of so much sadness, we can still see the glimmer of hope that scientists, doctors, nurses, hospital personnel, first responders, and our own neighbors bring as they do their best to serve. The ordinary people who become extraordinary by their generosity, through their sharing of food, shelter, and funds

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From the Editor's Desk



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Thank you.

*H*appy spring to all! Although the temperatures are still quite chilly, the tips of the daffodil leaves are poking up, so we hope it won't be too much longer until the spring breezes and sunshine grace us, and Newport will be abloom again with more than a million daffodils around our yard and all round town.

We hope and pray that spring will also dispel COVID, for it has been a very difficult year for all of us. May the coming months renew our strength and hope and grant consolation to all of the friends and relatives who have experienced the loss of loved ones.

Sister Anne Marie

Photo: charles-tyler-NT-SZNVl8co-unsplash

*During this year
dedicated to St. Joseph,
Patron of the Universal Church
and our congregation patron,
we pray that
Joseph the Provider
may watch over us all.*



(Image by Sister Rachel Philippe Racine, SJC)

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An Innovative Program for Student Success



Photo: Chamblanc Cluny Lycée

Students get “hands-on” experience in every aspect of catering.

Cluny Sisters in Chamblanc, France, where Blessed Anne Marie grew up and first began to gather the children, carry on her vision: all are children of God and all are welcome.

Our thanks to the Chamblanc Cluny Lycée for sharing this good news story.

The new Anne-Marie Catering Program, recently opened in Chamblanc, offers a second chance to struggling students who were ready to just drop out of school.

When a student was asked in an interview, “What are you doing?” he replied, “I’m sending a photo of my grades to my grandmother. I have never had 80% on a test, this is the first time! I dream of going to work in Japan and I need a good training.”

The students in this program had given up on everything until someone put them in touch with “Atelier Anne Marie”. They came to register, and their dreams blossomed as their learning and skills increased. The beginnings are tough, because the students have to get used to getting up early to be on time to receive the program of the day from their chef-teacher. Under his direction, the students prepare meals for 120 students and adults at noon at the Chamblanc Cluny Lycée (high school).

Students learn respect for themselves, others and authority as they master use of all the machinery, and respond to the demands made of them. During a friendly lunch, they share what they have learned, what was good, and what they can improve upon. They take turns working in all the positions: preparing ingredients, preparing the dishes on the

menus, serving at table, cleaning and tidying up.

The chef-teacher gets to know the abilities of each of the students, and is able to challenge them and help them gain self confidence.

The afternoons are dedicated to textbook training. Sometimes the teachers have to start over from the ground up, because in their previous schools, the students didn’t understand and no one paid attention to them. Now in small groups, with teachers providing individual attention, students make great strides. This classroom instruction, combined with the hands-on training, enables them to earn a diploma in catering after two years of study.

“The fight against drop out is a major concern at the human, social and economic level. Indeed, the psychological damage of dropping out is significant in terms of self-esteem and quality of life. Failure to value talent is a waste for society. Young people without a diploma are often long-term unemployed, or underemployed. The cost of dropping out for a person throughout life was estimated by the BCG firm at 230,000 euros,” the director tells us.

Blessed Anne-Marie Javouhey wrote: “Young people, take charge of your lives.” Thanks to the new program dedicated to her in Chamblanc, her desire becomes reality for our students.

People of Hope Carrying on Our Mission in Difficult Times

The Province of West Africa

Our thanks to Sister Rita Boateng (Kono, Sierra Leone) for gathering these photos and stories to share with you.



Photos: Province of West Africa

The Gambia and Sierra Leone: Evangelizing on Radio and TV

In The Gambia, the Diocese of Banjul now has a Radio Veritas station. Sr. Cecilia Bass (top right) presents the lives of the saints on the radio. The program is also broadcast on the national television station.

Sisters Janie, Vivian and Mary Magdalen in Freetown, Sierra Leone, share their lives as Cluny Sisters on Radio Maria and pray with the radio audience. Listeners really appreciate their programs. The sisters also continue to spread the message about Blessed Anne Marie as we pray for her canonization.

The Gambia

Among other projects to support those affected by the pandemic, the sisters began a ground nut farming project. From plowing, to planting and weeding, growth and harvesting, the sisters worked hard but rejoiced in a great harvest!



Photos: Province of West Africa

People of Hope Carrying on Our Mission in Difficult Times

The Province of West Africa (Con't)

Ghana

Head porters are found in most areas of the southern part of Ghana. They are mostly young girls who leave home in the northern region to earn money. They live on the streets, in crowded rooms, stores and anywhere they can lay their heads for the night, after carrying heavy loads all day. They are left to the mercy of those who employ them for meagre wages. At Christmas, the sisters and a small team of lay friends prepared and distributed packages of food (jollof rice) and water to the head porters in three areas of Kumasi where the porters usually gather looking for



Photos: Province of West Africa

work. They gave food to about 250 porters. One can only imagine their joy in receiving some food for the holidays.

Province of the United States and Canada

Javouhey House, Newport, RI

Sister Marie Cooper

We see our sisters in many parts of the world on the front lines, reaching out to those affected by COVID-19 in the medical field, in the distribution of food, and other means of support. But we are confined. What can we do, if we can't be "out there" to touch the hearts of those who need someone?

At first we thought, "We'll make masks for medical personnel." But a strong allergic reaction to the fabric cut that effort short. There were, and still are, other immediate needs that include food, food, and more food!—"Grab and go" meals for those living in shelters or on the street, and staple foods for families who suddenly find themselves with no income, delivery of food to shut-ins. We also know of families living in rural areas without safe drinking water and newly arrived asylum seekers at our southern border.

We focus on three local groups who provide food to shut-ins and others in need. So far, we

have provided thousands of meals through these programs. We were also drawn to two other projects. The first is the Navajo Nation in Arizona, which is suffering greatly from a high rate of COVID-19 infection and an above average mortality rate. Hundreds of families do not have safe drinking water. We have provided 20 families, who each share with three other families, highly effective water filters. The second is a program run by women religious in Texas, where our support provides basic needs for many newly arrived asylum seekers in transition to their new homes with relatives across the country.

How we would love to be volunteering, organizing, greeting, and meeting all these people! Instead, we work from home, behind the scenes as we also accompany them in prayer. May each person's heart be touched with genuine care, respect, and support.

People of Hope Carrying on Our Mission in Difficult Times

The Province of Portugal

Sister Idalina Faneca (Madeira, Portugal)

In Lisbon, community of the Infant Jesus works in collaboration with the city. Sister Maria Bela and volunteers prepare food baskets for distribution at the center and for delivery to the homebound. The sisters also do shopping for the home bound, delivering medication and other purchases to them at home.

Together with volunteers the sisters prepare and distribute 100 meals per day.

In the Azores, Sister Domingas and the sisters make soup to distribute to those living on the streets. Sisters and students pack food the students contribute and take it to the children's home.

In Valtorno, the sisters also shop for the homebound, and deliver medication and other purchases to them at home.



Photos: Province of Portugal

Row 1: Sister Irmã (left) preparing meals and Sister Lenor (right) filling the take-out meal containers; Sister Irmã Salete delivering to the homebound. Row 2: Sisters Beatriz and Lurdes with volunteers putting food baskets together (left); Sister Beatriz giving out baskets (right).

OUR THANKS TO ALL OUR DONORS WHO REACH OUT WITH US TO KEEP TOUCHING ONE HEART AT A TIME BRINGING HOPE AND COMPASSION!

AND THIS YEAR IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER!

We continue to be stretched beyond our usual ministries in responding to those in need. And we are most grateful to all our donors for your generous support.

You touched my heart.

When I was so lonely ...

When we were hungry ...

When I was in trouble ...

When I'm alone I look forward to our Facetime chats ...

When you comforted us in our loss ...

When I was sick ...

When you got me shoes. Now I can play with the other kids ...

When we were cold ...

Please consider making a contribution today. No gift is too small.

You may use the enclosed envelope or donate online at our secure site:
<https://cluniusandcanada.org/share-in-our-mission/#make-a-donation>

People of Hope (Con't)

with those in need, remind us that there is still goodness and compassion all around us.

True, the pandemic uncovered the systemic inequalities brought about by selfishness and racism. As a society we are challenged to be more concerned for others. Despite the violence, negativity, and evil that is part of our world, we can be better. Although we aren't as young as we'd like, or as affluent, or as educated, or as handsome or all the other adjectives the world, and our own fears throw at us each day, we are here, we are still capable of doing the best we can wherever God has placed us. We are people

of hope and courage and we can come out of this time better than we were. The Lord will not give up on us. We can make tomorrow a better day if only we have the will. As Emily Dickenson wrote,

*We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies—**

May our prayers, hope and caring for each other and all our dreams lead us on.

*Emily Dickenson, "We Never Know How High We Are"



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Bringing Hope & Compassion

In Memoriam: Cluny Affiliate, Paul Gagne

Sister Anne Marie Liston

The word “righteous” was often used in literature, usually in a religious vein. It’s rarely used today. Yet, when I think of our good friend and Affiliate, Paul Gagne, it seems the most appropriate of titles.

Paul was a loyal parishioner of our parish, St. Augustin’s. He served the Newport community well in his lifetime as a firefighter, becoming Chief, and later, as General Manager at TJ Brown’s where he put to good use his leadership skills and other expertise.

A devoted husband and father, his love and pride were evident when he spoke of his wife and family. At the mention of his name, people would invariably agree, “Paul is a good man.”

I only got to know Paul after he retired and shared his time and skills in helping us, the Clunys, first as we sought a new abode and then made Javouhey House our new home. Paul knew what to do, or who could handle various jobs, and he was just a phone call away. Night or day we could rely on him. Locked in the elevator? Water pipe burst? Or simply too much clutter? Paul would know what to do, and how to make it happen.

Paul’s devotion to his faith was an inspiration. Not many people can witness to their faith so comfortably and sincerely. Listening to him I had the sense that he was really in touch with what he believed and at home with his God.



Photo: Sister Marie Cooper

Paul Gagne on the day that he and Mary became Cluny Affiliates

We cherish the memory of Paul’s friendship and as an Affiliate of our religious congregation. He will be dearly missed. He brought to our lives the goodness of his own beliefs and loyalty. God called our friend for a greater reward. He now humbly walks with his God and his beloved wife, Mary. Rest in peace, dear friend. May heaven receive the kindness you shared with us.