

Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny
Province of USA & Canada

Connections

Congratulations,
Sister Teresa McKeon!
Province of West Africa



The Ambassador Aiden Fitzpatrick presents Sister Teresa with the Presidential Distinguished Service Award from the Republic of Ireland.

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Just as we went to press, the news of Pope Francis' going home to God on this Easter Monday brought us great sadness. We give thanks for his extraordinary and inspiring life, his steady and open-hearted moral leadership, and the many ways he reminded us of *the great hope to which we are called*. (Ephesians 1:18-20)

We have many reasons to celebrate at Easter. Sister Teresa McKeon is receiving recognition for her many years of selfless contribution, and the rich harvest that continues to be gathered in Sierra Leone. Here in the United States, we were blessed to come together in assembly in January.

In February Therese Champion, a past student at Cluny School in Newport, was honored for her work with the Ladies Auxilliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Thanks to the messenger/phone service What'sApp, we were happy to receive news from Sister Sylvian about the literacy schools in Papua New Guinea.

We welcomed the newest member to our region, Sister Regina Lepcha, from the Province of North India/Nepal. Sister Regina is a member of the community of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey in California. We will introduce her and tell you more about her in our next issue.

Our Lenten activities at Javouhey House included several group gatherings: the creation of 60 Blessing Bags of personal essentials for disadvantaged persons; a reflection on our Pilgrimage of Hope during this Holy Year 2025; a deep dive into Pope Francis' book, *On Hope*, which reminds why hope does not disappoint; and a day of prayer pondering God's promise, "I know the plans I have for you ... for a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

As the Easter Season unfolds, may you be drawn into God's loving plan for you, and *a future of hope*. – Sister Marie

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Sister Teresa McKeon

By Sr. Marie Cooper, SJC

At 95, after a lifetime of service and vast accomplishment spanning two continents, no one would blame her for resting on her laurels. But Sister Teresa McKeon is known for always rising to great challenge. These days, she's receiving accolades and tributes from so many sources that this month she is our featured profile in our spring newsletter.

From Mullingar, Co Westmeath, Ireland, Sister Teresa was one of the first women to complete an Honors Math degree in University College Dublin/National University of Ireland. She was missioned to West Africa 70 years ago, arriving to the capital of Sierra Leone by ocean liner in 1954. The sister and the country proved to be an inspired combination with long-lasting effects. She'd go on to spend her life advancing the education, welfare, and rights of thousands of girls and women across Sierra Leone – teaching at St. Joseph Secondary School in Freetown, then becoming principal. Under her leadership, St. Joseph's would become one of the top schools in the country.

From 1975-1983, Sister Teresa dedicated herself to her sisters and the ministries of their communities as Leader of the Cluny West Africa Province (Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Ghana). In that role, she established and taught adult education courses in business, financial management, nutrition, catering, and tailoring. Her work helped thousands of women and men to gain good jobs, new opportunities, and financial independence in an otherwise-challenging economic environment.

Sierra Leone's bloody Civil War, from 1991 to 2002, tore the country apart and caused an estimated 50,000 deaths. Using her skills at community organizing and empowerment, Sister Teresa protected and promoted the livelihoods of women. This was not just by inspiring them or offering them charity. She, herself, accompanied by other Cluny Sisters, moved with the women to a refugee camp in Fangamandou, Guinea, and set



Sister Teresa McKeon

up programs to provide training and sustainable work. Particularly productive were tailoring and dressmaking classes that successfully provided opportunities for building real skills, earning money, and her program provided a sewing machine to each woman upon completion of the course.

Her time in the refugee camp was punctuated by news that the rebels were advancing on the area, which required her to rapidly escape with all the women under her care and set up a camp farther from harm's way. Her memory of those frightening times was: "Those were great years, and I enjoyed them so!"

After the war, Sister Teresa returned to the rural diamond mining area of Kono, one of the hardest impacted areas during the war. There she established a school and worked with women and girls to help rebuild their lives. Today, the elementary and secondary schools that she established after the war still thrive. In 2023, that secondary school placed first in the country, and all the graduates qualified for entrance into schools of higher education – a stunning accomplishment.

In 2024, The Ministry of Education and the municipality of Kono recognized the schools

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Cluny Region Assembly

Together ignite the world with love and hope

By Sister Agnes Marie Arokiynathan
Community of Mary Star of the Sea, San Pedro, CA



Sisters Ena, Maria, Mary and Mary Patrice

Together Ignite the World with Love and Hope is the theme of our General Chapter 2024.

To implement this theme in our Region of the United States, and to draw up an action plan we gathered at Serenity Senior Village in San Pedro, CA, the residence of our Mary Star of the Sea Community, from January 10th to January 13th 2025. Ten Sisters from the east and west coasts participated in the assembly. Sisters Agnes Marie, Ena, Genevieve, Maria, Marie, Mary Josephine, Mary Patrice, Mavis, Luke, and Vicenta. Sisters Yannick, Eugenia and Loretto were not able to be present, but they were with us in spirit. It was a happy moment to meet each other.

Natalia Dubon served as translator excellently translating every session from English to Spanish and Spanish to English as needed.

Our facilitator, Sister Barbara Mullen, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry, is a resourceful and dynamic person. She led the days very smoothly and efficiently.

With her guidance, we were able better to envision the future of our Region in the light of our Missionary Orientations. We prayed together, reflected together, and shared the pros and cons, opportunities and challenges of our present time and rejoiced in the experience of our *Cor unum* (being of one heart and one soul). †

Assembly (Continued)



L_R: Sister Luke, Mavis, Agnes Marie, Ena, Marie, Mary Genevieve, Vicenta and Maria



Sisters Genevieve, Mavis, Agnes, and Vicenta



Sisters Marie and Genevieve



Sisters Genevieve and Luke

Photos

The sisters from each house brought a candle they had prayed with to exchange with sisters from another house. At the end of the assembly, Sister Genevieve presented the candles and a copy of the Assembly 2025 Statement.



Papua New Guinea

A heart for the whole world

By Sister Marie Cooper

Excitement was in the air in the summer of 1971 in our Cluny Motherhouse in Paris, France. For the first time, Cluny Sisters were being sent on mission to Papua New Guinea. They first went to Kanabea, a remote region of river deltas and swamps, surrounded by mountains and dense forests. Although it is possible to travel in and out by air, the area is often immersed in heavy fog because of its high elevation. It can sometimes be several months before planes can take off or land.

After 54 years, the mission continues to grow and blossom thanks to the collaboration of our two Papuan Sisters, Fatima and Sylvian, with our sisters from India, who make heroic efforts to minister in the rural areas of Kanabea and Bema as well as in the city of Port Moresby. From these hubs, where the sisters are engaged in faith formation, education and health care, they travel out into isolated areas.

Literacy schools, scattered through the rural area provide instruction for the young, and sometimes the not-so-young in preparation for formal education.

Sister Pia, from India, is the coordinator for 12 literacy schools over a wide area. Accompanied by some of the villagers from Kanabea, she untiringly makes long treks, sometimes up to three hours on foot, to reach a school. During her visits Sister Pia spends time in the classroom with the students and provides in-service training for the teachers. She participates in the life of the parish where she trains local village catechists.

Sister Sylvian, who assists Sister Pia, recently wrote: "Our mission as Cluny Sisters is to have a heart for the whole world. This sends us to the periphery so that no one is left behind. We are often challenged, but God gives us what we need." Words reminiscent of those of our founder, Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey. †



Photo: Sister Sylvian

Sister Pia at one of the twelve the Literacy Schools



Photo: Sister Sylvian

Sister Pia conducting in-service for Literacy School teachers.



Photo: Sister Sylvian

Celebrating children's baptisms in the parish

News from Our Past Students

Congratulations, Therese Champion!

(Cluny School Graduate)



Therese Champion

When she sees a problem to solve, Therese (Terrie) Champion is someone who steps up. Twenty five years ago, the Women's Auxilliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians was about to fold. Terrie was one of six women who responded to the call to renew and reenergize this wonderful association of Catholic women of Irish heritage who engage in service in the local community. Today the Newport, R.I. chapter is the largest and most active in the nation.

On the First of February at St. Augustin Church, following the annual Mass of the Feast of St. Brigid of Ireland, Terrie and her companions were honored at a dinner attended by family, friends, parishioners, and Newport dignitaries. Terrie's children Megan and Patrick, also Cluny grads, together offered her a moving tribute.

Thank you, Terrie, for your faithful and faith-filled dedication! †

NOTE: We Cluny Sisters who have taught you, and worked with you, whether in school or parish, are always delighted to hear from past students and families. So please send us news about yourself or others that you have been in contact with. Thank you!

Congratulations, Sister Teresa (Continued)

for excellence in both the Basic Education Certificate Exam and the West African Senior School Certificate Exam. Along with the awards, the schools received computers, a projector, and textbooks.

In 2018, to honor her tireless and remarkably effective work for the Sierra Leone people, Sister Teresa was granted citizenship and awarded Sierra Leone's highest civil honor, the Order of Rokel. She has continued to teach throughout her long and remarkable career and now lives with her community at St. Joseph Primary School in the heart of Freetown, her days filled with the noise and laughter of the 500+ children attending the school.

Sister Angela Bangura, current Leader of the Cluny Sisters in the Province of West Africa, said that Sister Teresa's has been an extraordinary life that is "testament to the Irish abroad who have given their all for all of us. I have benefitted from that because I went to the schools run by Irish Sisters and today, I'm a nun because of them." The Irish missionaries have been some of the most dedicated sisters in the worst places at the worst times.

On February 5, 2025, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Sister Teresa received the prestigious Presidential Distinguished Service Award from the Republic of Ireland, the ceremony held at the Cluny Convent on Charlotte Street, Freetown. Surrounded by children, friends, her former pupils, and Cluny sisters, the Irish Ambassador, Aiden Fitzpatrick, presented Sister Teresa the award in recognition of her significant contributions to education, the empowerment of women, her remarkable impact to society, and the enduring legacy she's created for future generations in Sierra Leone.

Sister Teresa's story was featured on Irish national television on Nationwide on RTÉ One TV and RTÉ Player. Great thanks go to the Cluny Sisters of the Province of West Africa, the Government of Ireland International Development Program, and RTÉ for the impressive source material included in this tribute to such a remarkable woman. †



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With great sadness at his passing, we join in prayer, and give thanks
for the gift of Pope Francis to the Church and to the world.
May he rejoice forever in the love of the God to whom he devoted his life!



Pope Francis at the Blessing of the Children

Please remember the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in your will. Thank you.

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