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# PAST FORWARD

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The Newsletter of the Sisters of Providence Archives, Seattle

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## JUBILEE 2000

For people of many faiths, the year 2000 will be a year of Jubilee. The celebration of Jubilee every fifty years has a scriptural basis (Leviticus 25) and takes on particular significance as we enter the third millennium of Christianity. A modern interpretation of Jubilee (taken from Proclaim Jubilee!, by Maria Harris) calls us to focus on the themes of forgiveness, liberation, connectedness, suffering, creativity, and repair of the world.

These themes have been exhibited throughout Providence history and examples are found in the history of individual institutions, the health system, and the religious community. In preparation for Mission Week, we would like to share a few of these examples and encourage you to contact us for more information.

**FORGIVENESS** is often seen in a financial context--the forgiving of debts. In the archives we have historic patient ledgers, with numerous accounts marked "Paid--Charity." Today, our Providence foundations raise millions of dollars for uncompensated care. Historically, hospitals in the system also lent money to each other in times of need, and in many cases, these debts were forgiven. Such actions have strengthened our system and the communities we serve.

**LIBERATION** traditionally called for the freeing of slaves, and today it seeks freedom for people to be who they are within the dominant culture. The Native American Spirituality Center at Providence Toppenish Hospital accommodates the spiritual practices of the Yakama nation with respect to new life, healing, and death. In Anchorage, the Mary Conrad Center supports the native Eskimo culture within a unique, long-term care setting. These and other efforts in the health system are based on our core value of respect for all people.

SPECIAL MISSION WEEK ISSUE:  
READ ABOUT THE HISTORY OF  
MISSION WEEK AND THE THEME OF  
JUBILEE, WHICH WILL BE THE FOCUS  
OF OUR 1999 CELEBRATIONS.

**CONNECTEDNESS** emphasizes the wholistic view of life, collaboration, and interdependence. From the Ladies of Charity--Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic lay women who came together to establish our first hospital in 1858--to the staff and volunteers throughout the system today, the Sisters of Providence have relied on people of all faiths to carry out their ministry. The international focus of the religious community--with sisters in eight countries on four continents--and the health system's International Mission Program witness to our connectedness to people around the world.

**SUFFERING** reminds us there are no easy solutions to life's problems, but that answers may be found in reflection, ritual, and community. As superior of the young Providence community, Mother Gamelin was severely criticized by her friends and other sisters; she accepted the criticism in silence and found solace in prayer. Working with others, she turned her grief into action on behalf of suffering humanity. Mother Joseph also understood that suffering accompanies all decisions in life. In 1901, she convinced the community to open Providence Hospital in Oakland, despite the sacrifices it would entail: "If in making a foundation, we wait until we do not have to deny ourselves, we shall never take on a new work, for we shall never be without work."

**CREATIVITY** celebrates the imaginative ways in which we can overcome obstacles and live out the other themes of Jubilee. In Providence history, it is seen in the ways in which Mother Joseph and her early sisters used their artistic and creative

talents to support their work: hosting bazaars and dances; selling pre-paid tickets for hospital care; operating farms to supplement food supplies; teaching music and French to affluent students in order to subsidize care of the orphans.

REPAIR OF THE WORLD is both the means and the end of Jubilee . . . and of the Providence Health System. The 1859 Articles of Incorporation state as our purpose "the relief of needy and suffering humanity in the care of the orphans, invalids, sick and poor, and in the education of youth," while our contemporary mission statement calls us to share in "the healing ministry of Jesus in the world of today." Mission Week will be an opportunity to renew our commitment to this mission in light of these specific Jubilee themes.



## DID YOU KNOW THAT . . .

Our annual Mission Week celebration dates back only to 1988?

The feast of Our Mother of Sorrows, September 15, and the anniversary of the death of Mother Emilie Gamelin, September 23, are traditional feast days for the Sisters of Providence, and they were occasionally celebrated in the sisters' early hospitals and schools. However, the annual celebration of a Mission Day or Week throughout the Providence Health System is relatively new.

In the mid-1980s, Yvonne LeBlanc, SP, Vice President for Mission Effectiveness, developed a system-wide Mission Practicum program, in which each manager and every department was asked to write a statement regarding their personal understanding and commitment to the Providence

Mission. In 1988, Sister Yvonne called for the Mission Practicum to be renewed annually on "Providence Day," September 23: "Administrators and employees are urged to make the celebration of this feast an annual tradition. On this day, corporate leadership calls for the renewal of Mission Practicums in the spirit of a particular theme for the coming year."

Our contemporary celebration of Mission Week stems from this Mission Practicum program. It has evolved over the past decade into a general celebration of the heritage and mission of Mother Gamelin, Mother Joseph, and the Sisters of Providence as sponsors of the Health System.

The system's 1993 Guidelines for Mission Integration states: "Once each year, in conjunction with the observance of Mother Gamelin's feast day or the Mission Renewal Program or some other appropriate occasion, all members of the SPSHS will be missioned through a simple ceremony that reaffirms their commitment to and inclusion in the mission of the Providence Health System. This is also an opportunity for representatives of the Sisters of Providence religious community to convey their gratitude and support of women and men who have become their co-workers in this mission."

During the 1994 Mission Week at Providence Yakima Medical Center, Karin Dufault, SP, Chair of the Board of Directors, reflected on the purpose of the celebration: "During Mission Week, we remember Emilie Gamelin and we reflect on what meaning her life holds for us today. Although she lived a century ago, I believe she does not draw farther from us in time and purpose, but closer because of the vision we share with her of a world where love and care are shown toward all, especially the poor. . . . This is a time when we pause and reflect together on who we are, upon our common heritage and our tradition. During this week we reaffirm our identity and we draw renewed strength and inspiration from the story that is ours."

## HAPPY MISSION WEEK!

Sisters of Providence Archives  
4800 37th Avenue Southwest, Seattle, WA 98126  
(206) 937-4600

[archives@providence.org](mailto:archives@providence.org)

Loretta Greene, Archivist; Terri Mitchell, Assistant Archivist; Sister Rita Bergamini, SP, Archivist Assistant