When asked about the recent decision regarding the Irish Ursulines joining the international Roman Union, the reply was: “we speak the same Ursuline language.” The Sisters are familiar with the spirit of Angela Merici, the history of the Company of St. Ursula, and of the various groups of Ursulines world-wide. The official incorporation of the Irish Union into the Roman Union will occur on the feast of St. Angela, January 27, 2018.

The earliest Irish Ursuline convents grew from foundations in France from the 18th century. Like many Ursuline convents world-wide, the original Irish Ursuline convents in Cork, Thurles, Waterford and Sligo were independent monasteries. Most Ursulines taught in one of the local schools or served the school and community.

“Renewal” was the keyword among the Irish Ursulines after Vatican II. It opened them to the broader ministries of serving in parishes and of pastoral development. This spiritual direction presented new ministries among many religious women who had previously been more cloistered and exclusively devoted to teaching. At present, many retired sisters in Ireland are engaged in a variety of parish ministries as well as other services.

Today there are 55 Irish Ursuline sisters in Ireland, 4 in Wales and 31 professed in Kenya where the sisters are teachers, nurses, and vocational/formation personnel. The Irish Ursulines began ministries in Kenya in 1957.

In a recent visit to the Eastern Province, Sr. Anne Harte Barry, their Congregational Leader, and Sr. Anne Marie Dixon, the Assistant, visited several communities and ministries and introduced themselves at province gatherings. They were happily surprised to find that so many Eastern Province Ursulines share their Irish roots!
From the Editor

Editor’s note: There’s much in this Bylines issue from the Irish Ursulines on the front page to the DACA statement on the last page.

We look forward to hearing from you about a Bylines story or an item on the website that may have struck a resonant chord. Please drop us a note or visit our website at osueast.org to offer comments, suggestions or story ideas.

PROVINCIAL NOTES
Jane Finnerty, O.S.U.

At our Province Meeting in September, we revisited the challenge to respond to the gospel question, “Who is my neighbor?”

The question, new every day, demands a response from each of us. Welcoming the stranger as our neighbor is an intrinsic part of who we are as people of faith.

Nationally, issues surrounding the questions of the neighbor, the stranger, have touched our hearts and our consciences: efforts to offer affordable health care, discussions around immigration, and the resurgence of racism in public protests are some of the issues that strike at the heart of who we are as Americans and as Christians. We are called to be involved in ways that put shared biblical values into practice. Extensive media coverage enabled us to witness the overwhelming response of countless women and men toward their neighbors and total strangers caught in the devastation of hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires and tragic shootings.

During this year we have experienced the global reality of our Ursuline family which extends for us the awareness of neighbor. Sisters from Brazil and Chile came to our province for the opportunity to study English. Conversations with Sr. Jackie DaSilva, recently returned from Venezuela, heighten our awareness of those suffering in Venezuela. At the world-wide Ursuline Global Education Conference in South Africa educators gained a new sense of “neighbor” as they explored best practices in global education. Sisters Anne Harte Barry and Anne Marie Dixon from Ireland shared the journey of faith of the Irish Union Ursulines toward joining the Roman Union. Our international bonds are strong and mutually enriching.

These challenging times for our country and our global community require us to be people of hope who discern what our contribution ought to be for the life of the world.

Pope Francis recently stated that hope begins with one individual – you – and eventually becomes an “us” capable of starting a revolution of ‘tenderness’. “We are all called to rekindle in our hearts an impulse of hope that should result in concrete works of peace, reconciliation and communion.”

We ask the Holy Spirit and St. Angela to enlighten all of us as to how we must respond to the question, new every day — “Who is my neighbor?”
On her recent visit to New York I had the chance to interview Sr. Bernadette Mackay about her work in the Dominican Republic. Sr. Bernie has been with the DR mission for 29 of the 31 years she has worked for the republic’s sister Diocese of Orlando, FL. — Terry Eppridge, O.S.U.

Q. Bernie, what is your main work in the DR?
A. For the past 17 years I have been working more specifically with five mountain communities. When I first arrived, most of the people were illiterate. The adults didn’t read or write. Today some of those same adults are doing their master’s degree and some have already finished and are teachers in our school. We have at present 412 children in the mission school. Of those who first started, maybe 9 are in University now. This is a quantum leap for the community.

Our mission school goes from pre-K to 9th grade. Most of our graduates go to a residence boarding high school in Azua, a coastal city two hours south from the mountain villages. A few of our best students go to high schools in Orlando. At present, we have 12 children in Florida. They range in age from 13 to 19 and are in 5 different high schools in the Orlando Diocese. Each school gives two scholarships for 4 years and this year one of the parishes gave an extra scholarship. When those two graduate, another two come in, a great gift to the children. All are A students and are graduating with a 4.2 average. Upon graduation, some study at the University in Orlando and two are at St. Thomas University in Miami. Others go home and go to University in Santo Domingo. There is no university up on the hill. From the resident program in Azua, six just got into University to train for teaching.

Q. Have you any expectation that they will come back to the village to teach?
A. We have great expectations that those presently studying at the University in Santo Domingo will come back to teach with us in 2018. We are holding a teaching position for them for next summer, so they better be coming back. They will be the most educated ones in the village at that point.

Q. Who cares for the Orlando students?
A. The students that go to school in Orlando live with a host family that takes them in, feeds and clothes them. We don’t pay anything for them. That’s why we can do it. The Diocese pays to bring them and to take them home. They go home for two months in the summer, to maintain their roots, so they will want to go back to where they came from.

Q. How have recent hurricanes affected you and your work?
A. Hurricanes are challenging in the mountains. Weather stations begin warnings about a week in advance. Anxiety builds quickly. Irma was destined to go straight through the Dominican Republic but fortunately moved a bit offshore leaving a lot of rain for the mountain villages. The main crop of red beans was totally wiped out in August because of lack of rain. The farmers also plant what we call pigeon peas, green peas, and they were just about flowering at this point but I haven’t been back yet to find out whether they have survived. These two crops are their complete livelihood. [A recent visit showed that the pea crop survived and is well into the flowering stage.]

Additionally, we have young children in a residential program in the city of Azua and so the challenge was to get them to their homes before the rains came and the flooding that would take place. We got the children up and out. That was our blessing. Then came Maria two weeks later. Again, the eye of the storm moved NE. The little shift still meant a lot of rain and the anxiety of it. Irma was coming straight for Florida where we have the high school students. It was hard to find where their host parents were and where they were going to be housed during the storm. The students all stayed with their host family when they evacuated. One went
as far as Ohio. Others went further north in Florida. For myself it was a challenge to find a safe place. At the last moment, I got in my car and drove farther north to a friend’s house. The brunt of the hurricane came over where I was staying but the house was strong. My own house was also undamaged but my mango tree fell. Fortunately, it landed one inch from the house. I was sorry to lose my mango tree but super grateful for the one inch.

Q. Would you like to add anything?

A. I think a word of gratitude because we have just received from the Province Serviam Fund a check for $10,000 to send Yissel to school. A very bright kid. Her story is unique. At age 3 months she should have died. Visiting missioners found her. They took her to the hospital, got her help and medicine, brought her back up to the village and for that week cared for her as though she were their own. Today she is a bright thirteen-year-old. I had no more scholarships available so I appealed to the Serviam Fund for help. She is doing extremely well and my gratitude is immense for this little baby who is now a big girl. Her life was a challenge from the beginning and when she reached high school age it was another challenge. I think she is going to do very, very well.

Sr. Bernie, born in Trinidad, entered the Ursuline Caribbean Province. After tertianship (a year of renewal in Rome) she transferred to the Eastern Province, soon going to work in Florida with Sisters Teresa Byrne and Sheila Murphy. There Bernie began her ministry with migrant workers.

Sr. Bernie remarked, “This old gentleman’s aches and pains were not something the medical docs could reverse. Taking time to listen and share his struggle was the medicine for the moment.”  Photo taken in los Guayyes.

In the spring 2017 issue of Bylines, we endeavored to provide iPads for some of the Sisters in order to maintain brain health. Since then, a generous donor and teacher, Rita Ferrari, provided an iPad as well as instruction to Sr. Betty Ann Sommer, age 88, who agreed to participate in this initiative. Sr. Betty and Rita met a few times so Betty could learn the basics of how to use an iPad. It was very generous of Rita not only to donate the iPad but also the hours of instruction which made this transition much easier.

I visited Sr. Betty to find out how her “iPad experience” is working out. She said she “loves it”! She has learned how to connect more easily with family and friends. Her nieces send photos of their children. She loves to be able to readily remain in touch with family and friends. She also is learning how to order books online since she loves to read. She said “googling” items of interest has spurred her thinking and learning about subjects that she would never have considered before. She is grateful to Rita for donating the iPad and giving the time to teach her. She feels more engaged in life due to the iPad even when she is not using it.

We have almost enough donations for another Sister to participate in this initiative. If you would like to donate partial or the full price ($225) towards one, please contact Sara Gunn, Director of Development, 914-712-0068 or sara.gunn@osueast.org.
I have served as Director of Development for the Ursuline Sisters for a little over a year. We have accomplished a lot together. We updated the donor database, the website, initiated a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter, started recruiting people for a Development Board of Advisors and started the “Voices of Angela” video series capturing the biographies of many of our Sisters. We look forward to the coming year to increase support but also to share the amazing work of the Ursulines with many more people.

I learned so much in this past year about the Ursuline sisters, such as:

1. They were founded in 1535 by Saint Angela Merici.
2. In 2014, Saint Marie of the Incarnation became the second canonized Ursuline Saint.
3. They were the first Catholic Sisters in America, arriving in 1639.
4. An Ursuline, Mother Irene Gill, founded in 1904 The College of Saint Angela, renamed The College of New Rochelle.
5. There are three Ursuline high schools in the Eastern Province: Academy of Mount St. Ursula (Bronx, NY), Ursuline Academy (Wilmington, DE), and The Ursuline School (New Rochelle, NY).
6. The first female pharmacist in the United States was an Ursuline.
7. The first woman to contribute a book of literary merit in the US was an Ursuline.
8. The first convent in the US was Ursuline.
9. The first free school in the US was Ursuline.
10. The first US retreat center for women was Ursuline.
11. The first classes in the US for female slaves, free women of color and Native Americans were provided by Ursulines.
12. The Ursuline Sisters of the Eastern Province are part of the Roman Union of Ursulines, an international organization with a Motherhouse in Rome, Italy.
13. The first social welfare center in the US was Ursuline.
14. They speak softly. They are multi-lingual.
15. They travel the world several times a year.
16. They are on a first name basis with St. Angela.

On May 20, at the Province Center, we marked the transition of province leadership with ceremony and celebration. Associate member Eileen Niedzwiecki was the emcee for the event.

Sr. Anne Dillen recently exhibited her watercolor paintings at two New Rochelle, NY exhibits. One was a Juried Exhibition “Creation” at Beth-El Synagogue and the second, the New Rochelle Council of the Arts exhibit “Free For All” at the Rotunda Gallery in City Hall.

In October, over 45 Ursulines from across the US (fifteen from the Eastern Province), and 8 Associates and Collaborators including Marguerite Gomes and Meg Kane-Smith of Wilmington, DE, pictured below, gathered in Chicago for a workshop on Contemplative Dialogue, a way of praying with and listening to others. The two-day workshop was facilitated by Sr. Liz Sweeney, SSJ.
We, the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union, United States Provinces, stand with our Catholic Bishops in support of the Dream Act of 2017 (S1615). This past Sunday evening, October 8, the Trump Administration Immigration Policy Priorities were issued. We strongly reject these anti-immigrant, anti-human rights, anti-family provisions as basically immoral.

These provisions propose the building of southern border walls and expedited deportations as conditions for acting to protect young undocumented immigrants, the Dreamers, who were brought to the United States as children and now know no other home. These young people cannot become the bargaining chips in the game of politics. President Trump made a promise and acknowledged responsibilities to the Dreamers. These Policy Priorities are in direct opposition to these promises.

Children and young people are our future. Those brought to the United States as children are among those who warrant the security of a legal status to fulfill their dreams in the only country they have known, complete their education and continue contributing to society. Testimony abounds to their contributions in our country. The Dream Act helps our country towards a more secure future by providing a path for those individuals who meet the requirements to fully develop their potential without fear of deportation and with the hope of citizenship.

We urge Congress to support the Dream Act of 2017. This continues our corporate stance regarding comprehensive immigration reform:

The Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union in the United States are committed to comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform. This is rooted in our profound belief in the dignity of each human person created in God’s image. We are all brothers and sisters. Our foundress, Angela Merici invites us to...“love them all...because they are God’s children.... Welcome them and bear with all of them impartially.”