Celebrating Black History Month

Gladys West - Mathematician

Sister Callista Robinson

In 2018, the focus of the articles for Black History Month was on Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson and Katherine Johnson who were known as “The Hidden Figures” as they worked behind the scenes and became very vital to the Space Program. This article will focus on Gladys West another “Hidden Figure,” a mathematician who helped to develop the calculations for the Global Positioning System (GPS).

Gladys Mae Brown was born in 1931 in Dinwiddie County, Va., to a farming family in a community of sharecroppers. After graduating from high school, she received a full scholarship to study math at Virginia State University. She obtained a position teaching math to high school students before completing studies for a master’s degree.

In 1956, she was hired to work at the Naval Support Facility in Dahlgren, Va. She was just one of four African American employees. She met her husband, Ira West, at the naval base and they married in 1957. Her husband was also a mathematician.

She analyzed data from satellites, putting together altimeter models of the earth’s shape. Gladys became a programmer in the Dahlgren Division for large scale computers and a project manager for data processing systems used in the analysis of satellite data.

Captain Godfrey Weekes, commanding officer at the Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division, described the role played by West in the development of Global Positioning System, “She rose through the ranks, worked on the satellite geodesy (science that measures the size and shape of the earth) and contributed to the accuracy of GPS and the measurement of satellite data.”

Gwen James, a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, which is Gladys West’s sorority, had this to say, “Her story is amazing, GPS has changed the lives of everyone forever. There is not a segment of this global society—military, auto industry, cell phone industry, social media, parents, NASA—that does not utilize the Global Positioning System.”
The annual Employee Appreciation event was held at St. Francis Convent on Tuesday, February 5, with many sisters, employees and guests present for the occasion.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Saint Francis Award. The Franciscan Sisters’ Values Committee sponsors this annual award, given to an employee who lives and extends the values of Saint Francis of Assisi and that of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls. Amy Scholl, Human Resources director, said, “Each year the employees and sisters nominate a person who manifests our Franciscan values—respect, open communication, hospitality and compassion—as they carry out their work with us.

“The 2018 Francis Award recipient is Sharon Kloss, who began working for the Franciscan Sisters in 2002. Those who nominated Sharon for the award commented that she goes above and beyond, always giving 100% in getting the job done. She takes time to talk and listen to both coworkers and sisters. Sharon has a strong faith and is the right person to receive this award.” Congratulations, Sharon!

Eleven employees were recognized for their years of service: 40 years: Jan Roering, Community Relations; 35 years: Sandy Plante, Finance; 15 years: Allen Riedeman, Operations; LaJoy Scepurek, Reception; Renata Scepurek, Reception; 10 years: Geri Dietz, Associates; 5 years: Rick Dietz, Franciscan Life Office; Pat Flicker, Franciscan Community Volunteers; Maureen Gertken, Archives; Kristin Haugo-Jones, Health and Wellness; John Nelson, Nutrition Services.
If you call them, will they come? In the winter?

Sister Joanne Klinnert

An idea that came to Sister Bernice Rieland was to call for a celebration of Valentine’s Day at our house at 609 3rd Street. But wheelchairs and boots don’t mix well with snow on steps and below zero temps.

Plan #2: a basement room at Mary Hall large enough to accommodate a few dozen sisters, some with wheelchairs.

Sister Bernice set to prepare games to play and snacks for “x” number of people. Sisters Carol, Joanne and Jean carried trays of these goodies and bags of prizes to Mary Hall. A collection of chairs was brought to increase sitting space.

The games mixed us up a bit from chair to chair, but we still found our way to pass the snack table to continue sampling!

The invitation had said that party time was 2-4 p.m., and with our usual respect for timing, we were all together from 2-4 p.m. with “prep” time before and clean-up time following! When is the next party?

Scholarship dollars in action…

Sister Cordy Korkowski, CRD

The most recent recipient of the Sister Judine Cassidy Scholarship Fund recently received her scholarship dollars. Asia Mohamed, a 2018 graduate of the Little Falls Community High School, successfully completed her first semester at St. Cloud Technical and Community College. Upon receipt of her first semester grade transcript, the Franciscan Sisters mailed a $500 check to the Financial Aid Office in St. Cloud. These dollars will now be applied to Asia’s student account and used for financial needs associated with her education.

Thank you to the St. Francis High School Alumnae and the Franciscan Sisters who established this scholarship fund in the name of Sister Judine. What a wonderful way to pass on the Franciscan Values to students pursuing a degree in health care or education.

Asia stopped in to present her college transcript to us on February 4. In addition, she enjoyed lunch with Sisters Clara Stang, Betty Berger, Carol Schmit, Bernice Rieland and Cordy Korkowski. Congratulations, Asia!
End of an era

Sister Gert Brixius

Fifty years ago, St. Therese in New Hope opened its doors. The St. Paul Benedictines provided leadership and staff. In June, 2010 the last St. Paul Benedictines left St. Therese. There were still two Benedictines from St. Joseph that provided ministry there. We Franciscans have been part of the ministry there for many years. Sister Jeremy Heim was staff nurse from 1986-2000. Sister Bernice Ebner was the executive director from 1992-1999. Sister Louise Bauer was a pastoral care minister from 2007-2019. Sister Louise’s leaving ends the era of sisters ministering at St. Therese. On February 7 there was a lovely farewell tea for her with the people from the apartments where she has been living for the past four years. At the tea, a former colleague of Sister Louise’s returned to emcee the program. She did a nice job recalling the services of the sisters and particularly of Sister Louise, who certainly endeared herself to the folks with whom she ministered and lived. She will be missed. An interesting note, a number of the workers in pastoral care these past years were former members of religious congregations.

Plan to attend!

Elizabeth Rydeen, CRD

Sister Elise Saggau will be signing copies of her book at a reception Friday, February 22, from 2-4 p.m. in St. Francis Hall. Invitations have been sent to friends and donors, and the public is invited as well. Please plan to attend and celebrate the completion of the book and the rich history of the community. This will be an opportunity to visit with local people from Little Falls and many others. I encourage you to extend the invitation to your friends and family. All are welcome!

Courageous Conversation Group

Sister Cordy Korkowski

Our Conversation Circle met on Tuesday, February 5. Members were Sisters Helen Brake, Phyllis Hennek, Mary Pat Burger, Georgine Larson, Jean Schwieters, Grace Skwira and Joyce Marie Piotrowski, with Sister Cordy Korkowski as facilitator. Honorary members, Sisters Helen Hassler and Vianney Weier were present in the prayer that Sister Mary Pat prepared for our first meeting. “We ask them to intercede for us—to stir our hearts, clarify our vision, loosen our tongues so we might talk about that which we need to talk about, hear what we need to hear, do what we need to do, all for our conversion and your greater honor and glory.”

Our Circle shared experiences of our childhood and adulthood with racism. It seemed that when parents and associates had positive approaches to cultures and diversity, it was transmitted. Today in our media and news, the theme of racism is prevalent. We shared learnings from various sources, and wondered if our early sisters from different nationalities and races felt mistreated or misunderstood. Relationships are the bridge that heals our prejudices, fear is the signal that indicates an emotional block. There was a wonderful exchange of ideas, and eagerness to continue learning and conversing.
Experience of initial conversion in the face of racism

Sister Mary Dumonceaux

I was raised in a town with a homogenous population. There were no persons of color in the school I attended. In 1962, I presented a high school science project at the state level at the University of Minnesota. Many people came to observe. One person was a science professor at the university. As he approached my display, I was very nervous and frightened because he was black. It was my first encounter with his race. I did not know his country of origin. But he was the person who took the most interest in my experiments and engaged in serious dialog during that whole day. This encounter has served to monitor my judgements about persons of difference for the rest of my life. My conscience says, be slow to pre-judge lest you miss some of your best human experiences.

St. Clare Library annual Book Swap

Elise Carey, St. Clare Library

Just a reminder, the St. Clare Library’s annual “I Love to Read” Book Swap for sisters, staff and library patrons is happening now. The Book Swap is running from Monday, February 11– Thursday, February 21.

Come by and have a look for a new book or two to read!
Please note: due to unknown circumstances, prayer requests were not received by CRD after they were removed from the bulletin board in the mail room. I apologize if your prayer request is not included below.
- Julie Haldenwanger

Please Pray for...
Sister Susan Knutson, who is recovering from knee replacement surgery.

Directory Changes
Please make the following changes to the Sisters sections of your directory:

Sisters Loraine Olmscheid, Marie Theis and Rose Mae Rausch have all moved to the Motherhouse. Their addresses will change to St. Francis Convent, 116 8th Ave SE, Little Falls, MN 56345. Their phone numbers will change to (320)632-2981. Sisters Lorraine and Marie will join B6. Sister Rose Mae will join B11.

Sister Donna Ebner has changed to B6.

Please make the following changes to the Associate section of your directory:
Sheila Gardner - change street address to 53 Main St

Thank You
“Somehow through the love and prayers of friends, moves the Almighty Hand of God.” – Author unknown, from a sympathy card

Overwhelmed is the only word to describe/express how I feel with all the kind attention I have received from you after the death of my brother, Adrian. I’m doing my best to absorb and remember the many ways you have reached out to me, and help me to feel “the Almighty Hand of God” with me. A special thank you to those who braved the cold to attend the funeral.

I became so aware again that the death of a person close and significant to us is “the end of an era” in our lives. Adrian was 15 years old when I was born and was always one of my “big brothers.” He lived a challenging and full life, was an example to me as he always kept his faith in God and his sense of humor. May he live in Peace.

Thank you to all of you for reaching out to me. God give you Peace.

Blessings, with love, prayers and gratitude,
- Sister M. Christelle Watercott

Upcoming Events
February 11-21 ................. St. Clare Library Annual Book Swap
February 21 ...................... Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina, 6-7 p.m.
February 22 ...................... Sister Elise Saggau book signing, 2-4 p.m.
March 6 ............................ Ash Wednesday

Enclosures
The Associate
March & April Birthdays/Feastdays

From Death to Life
We Praise God in...
Francis Doll, who died February 2 at the age of 90. He is a brother of deceased Sister Alice Doll.

Francis Bieg, who died January 24 at the age of 91. He is the husband of former Sister Theresa (Scapurek) Bieg.

Note
An electronic copy of the Franciscan Federation Musings will be available online. Printed copies will also be in the Mail Room and the library if you would prefer to read a hard copy.

Community News
is published biweekly by the Community Relations Department of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, for its members. News items and suggestions for this publication are welcome from community members. Send to:

Community News
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Articles are due noon Monday.
The next newsletter will be issued on February 27, 2019.