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Hearts on Fire
FEET ON THE MOVE



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Society for the Propagation of the Faith

Holy Family Sister Alicia Costa meets the pope

September 28, 2023



By Christine Bordelon
Clarion Herald



Venerable Henriette Delille

Sister Alicia Costa, congregational leader of the Sisters of the Holy Family, received a surprising, yet wonderful call recently from Broderick Bagert Jr., an organizer of the faith- and community-based Together New Orleans.

Bagert was inviting her to meet with Pope Francis at the Vatican Sept. 14 as part of the Industrial Areas Foundation's (IAF) 15-member contingent. They were the only members from Together New Orleans, an affiliate of the statewide Together Louisiana that aligns with IAF, a network of faith- and community-based organizations that builds leadership development to create citizen-led action.

Together New Orleans has concentrated on providing a consistent and affordable energy source for the vulnerable, a segment of the population that the Sisters of the Holy Family have cared for since their founding in 1842. The sisters' support of Together New Orleans' efforts was why Bagert said he invited her.



When Bagert asked Sister Alicia to join him in meeting with Pope Francis, she replied, "Is this real?"

Once Bagert assured her, she quickly answered, "Yes!"



The group arrived in Rome two days prior to visiting the pope and stayed at the Oblates of the Immaculate Mary Seminary in Rome to prepare for the visit. Sister Alicia said each of the 15 members had approximately 45 seconds to present thoughts on the environment, immigration, housing and the formation of priests and lay leaders. This gave the pope time to engage them in conversation.

She, Bagert and Mother Minerva Camarena Skeith, an Episcopalian minister from Austin, spoke on the climate, mentioning how Texas and Louisiana are not only affected by climate change but also contribute to its destruction with carbon emissions from petrochemical plants.

Of course, Sister Alicia included a mention of her foundress, Venerable Henriette Delille, whose cause for sainthood rests with the Vatican's Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.



In her brief remarks, Sister Alicia (through a Spanish interpreter) also said, "Your encyclical 'Laudato Si' was powerful and important for us. You are telling us it is a moral obligation to address environmental issues. IAF has made it possible for us to build the political power we need to act on that call. We are working to have 500 churches become 'community lighthouses' with solar panels and battery storage to serve their neighborhoods after disasters. And, imagine this. Our congregation is building its own solar farm on vacant land to lower electric bills of poor families."



"He was delightful – a phenomenal human being," Sister Alicia said. "He laughed with us and smiled. ... There was no fanfare. He was so down to earth and pleasant, witty and sharp. ... He was an excellent listener and very much in tune with what we were saying."

The pope responded positively as to how their work around climate and resilience to climate-driven disasters aligned with his encyclical, "Laudato Si," and to the diversity of the group of faith and community leaders during the hour talk.

He told the group a follow-up to "Laudato Si" is in the works and gave them a thumbs-up for their efforts so far.

"The world is at a limit and definitive decisions are being made, and we are not going to be moving backward," Bagert recalled Pope Francis assuring the group and supporting their efforts. "We've seen the pains of nature (floods, hurricanes). ... Nature is telling us something. It's a necessity to life itself. Otherwise the boat is sinking."

At the meeting's close, Sister Alicia said the pope joined hands and led the group in an "Our Father" and gave them and their artifacts a papal blessing.

"The blessing of a lifetime," she said.

Way to aide poor today

Sister Alicia's community's deep love and concern for the poor has been part of the charism of the Sisters of the Holy Family since its founding by Venerable Henriette Delille. In 2022, shortly after she was elected congregational leader, Sister Alicia said she took her leadership team, which included Holy Family Sister Judith Therese Barial, to a Together New Orleans meeting in New Orleans East about solar panels. New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond was there.

What the team heard was that Together New Orleans had a goal of creating 500 off-the-grid sources of power at churches and community centers in Louisiana called "community lighthouses" to help the poor. The idea developed in response to loss of electric power after Hurricane Id Bagert said.

The Sisters of the Holy Family could install a community solar farm on vacant property behind St. Mary's Academy as part of their ministry of hope and healing in the community. Her neighborhood off Chef Menteur Highway often endures power outages, she said, and climate change keeps increasing our local temperatures.

"We are working to do what we can to help the people in New Orleans and beyond," she said about aligning with Together New Orleans. "This is just another way."

A total of 86 community lighthouses are planned in New Orleans, with 24 to be completed by the 2024 hurricane season, Bagert said. So far, lighthouses exist at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Broadmoor Community Church, Crescent Care Health Center and Household of Faith Family Worship Church. Others are under construction at St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Marrero, Community Church Unitarian and New Line Fellowship.

The Sisters of the Holy Family have learned to organize community meetings and held a rally/march with information tents in April to fight human trafficking. St. Mary's Academy, St. Aug High and Abramson Academy attended. A second meeting was organized at neighboring St. Maria Gore Parish. "Together New Orleans is very concerned about organizing to improve our community," Sister Alicia said. "We joined ... We see this as a branch of our ministry. As our sisters have aged ... we don't have the woman power we used to have. ... So this gives us arms and legs and a voice to be able to still help our poor. That's why we got involved. Their mission is our mission."

**Many thanks to the Clarion Herald
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for permission to reprint this article.
Photo credits to: Broderick Bagert Jr.**

in a word or two



Fr. Clarence E. Williams, Jr., C.P.P.S., 1950-2023

Fr. Clarence E. Williams, Jr., C.P.P.S., 73, died on Saturday, July 8, 2023. He had been in failing health in recent years.

He was born on May 10, 1950, in Tuscaloosa, Ala., to Clarence E. Williams Sr. and Lula Belle (Woods) Williams. Raised in Cleveland, he was ordained in Cleveland on October 28, 1978. He was a member of The Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

Fr. Williams was a writer, preacher and pastor who throughout his more than 40 years as a priest was an advocate for Black Catholics and for racial justice and understanding.

In 1998, he received a doctoral degree in global education and cultural communication. He authored three books, many articles and gave presentations throughout the country on the theme of Racial Sobriety, a term with which he described his process for dealing with racism as a social illness, and a treatment program to help individuals and groups overcome racism. He established an institute, Recovery from Racism, dedicated to forming leaders and creating programs to counter racism. His work gained much attention from the Church, and he was invited to speak in many dioceses in the U.S. and abroad.

Throughout these years of ministry, he was also active in multimedia productions, acting as executive producer on a number of video projects, including several that highlighted the history and gifts that Black Catholics bring to the Church. We here at IN A WORD were privileged to work with Fr. Clarence on projects.

Fr. Clarence could speak compellingly to a crowd, yet make a solitary person feel completely heard and understood. A cheerful extrovert, he was happy to reach out to people from all walks of life. His educational achievements helped him excel as a communicator, but he never talked down to people and always appreciated the gifts they brought to the table of faith and fellowship.

Though health issues plagued his final years, he never lost his sense of optimism and hope that the children of God could learn to live together, free of racism and hate. Even on his worst days, he longed to get back to his active ministry to further the cause of healing through the Precious Blood of Jesus.

World Mission Sunday

As we celebrate World Mission Sunday this year, Pope Francis has asked us to look again at the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. This passage reflects the journey of all missionary disciples, and through it we can be renewed. He says, "Let us set out to make other hearts burn with the word of God, to open the eyes of others to Jesus in the Eucharist, and to invite everyone to walk together on the path of peace and salvation."

This worldwide celebration of our call to mission reminds us that we all contribute to the missionary movement of the Church. We offer our prayers and activities, material offerings, and our personal witness. On this day, we pray and reflect on the mission of the Church and our own personal call to mission. We are also invited to support the Pontifical Mission Societies, which foster missionary cooperation on both the spiritual and material levels for the areas of our world most in need of the Good News of God's love.

A MISSIONARY PRAYER

Father of all, you sent your Son to carry out your mission of redeeming the world. Many still have not heard his message of truth, love and forgiveness.

Our world is torn by war and conflict, poverty and injustice, intolerance and division. Let the light of your Gospel of love so shine in the world that it may be transformed into a worthy home for all your children of every race and country.

Bless all missionaries throughout the world that their work may bear fruit. Together with them, may we too share in your missionary work so that your Kingdom of justice, love and peace may come into all hearts and nations.

We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Arkansas.

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