In a spirit of sheer jubilance, over 275 people came together on October 19 in Reading, Pennsylvania to celebrate the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters' 125 Years of Mission in the United States. Energy filled the air as 100 Sisters joined friends, associates, benefactors, relatives, clergy, and civic leaders to mark this milestone and to give thanks to God for all the good the Sisters have accomplished since their founding in 1894.

Sister Marilisa da Silva, Congregational Minister of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, opened the celebration with words of welcome and paid tribute to their foundress, Mother Veronica Grzedowska. The Most Reverend Alfred Schlert, Bishop of Allentown, officiated at the Solemn Eucharistic Liturgy and Father Ronald Bowman, the Sisters’ Chaplain, served as homilist. The inspiring music of the choir ensemble along with international flag dancing accentuated the day’s ceremonies.

The joyous celebration was heightened by the presence of Sister Weronika Wegrzyn and Sister Klara Sarlinska who came from the same cloistered convent in Zakliczyn from which Mother Veronica came. Representative Sisters from Brazil and the Dominican Republic were also present for this significant event.

Memories were shared and acquaintances were renewed during the festive meal. The program that followed recognized the Sisters and the tremendous impact of their mission on countless people both locally and globally. The final blessing, given by all the Bernardines present, uplifted spirits as guests left with a deep sense of gratitude.

Trusting in Divine Providence, the Sisters move forward and thank all those who have helped to make their mission—the Mission of Jesus—a reality in today’s world. Indeed, we have great reason to REJOICE and BE GLAD!

The Motherhouse of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters is the “heart and home” of their international community, headquartered in Reading, Pennsylvania. It is the center from which their life, their mission, and their ministries flow. It is the place where Sisters take their first vows and the place from which they are laid to rest.

Sister Kateri Peake (far right) has been the administrator of the Motherhouse since 2006. While overseeing the

continued on next page
In 2019, two deadly tropical cyclones, Idai and Kenneth, pummeled Mozambique in mid-March and late April of 2019. Heavy flooding across the country resulted in several hundred deaths. More than two million people were left in need of humanitarian assistance and an estimated 1.8 million acres of crops were damaged or destroyed, causing food insecurity throughout the country. The residents of Nipepe have been experiencing more dire health and nutritional issues than usual in the wake of the devastation. Our missionary Sisters, including Sister Maria Helena Santana (right), provide life-saving care and nutritional assistance, along with hope, and the compassionate love of Jesus to some of the most vulnerable people in Nipepe. †

Advocating for the Poor in Brazil

Sister Maria Lucia de Araujo first became acquainted with the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in 1973 when they opened a mission in Itapipoca in Northeast Brazil. As a young girl, Lucia was drawn to the Sisters’ joyful spirit and their unwavering dedication in serving the sick and the economically poor. In working alongside the Sisters in their various missionary activities, Lucia responded to God’s call in her life and became a Sister.

Sister Lucia’s commitment to the poor has never waned in the twenty-nine years since she became a Bernardine. Throughout her religious life, Sister has tended to numerous people in need: the sick (pictured left), the poor, the marginalized, the incarcerated, and even small communities of fishermen.

Sister Lucia was instrumental in helping a community of fishermen realize their God-given potential and orchestrate positive change within their group.

“In my daily work, every step taken, no matter how small, helps to generate hope for the future. I believe the world will be better when those who struggle to “make it”, begin to believe in themselves,” remarked Sister Lucia.

Currently, Sister lives and ministers in Fortaleza where she assists young women in becoming Sisters. In addition, Sister visits families in need and continues to promote life, dignity, and human rights with a group of local residents. Throughout her whole life, Sister Lucia, who passionately lives the Mission of Jesus, has been an active advocate for the poor. †

Weathering the Storm in Nipepe, Mozambique

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From the Office of Development & Mission Advancement

Dear Friend,

The celebration is over! Our 125th anniversary is now behind us, but the dynamic work of our mission continues to move forward. Thank you for being a special part of our lives—and our mission—through your friendship, your financial support, and your prayer.

As I write to you today, we are preparing for our annual event, Bernardine Bonanza that will take place at our Motherhouse on February 22 to benefit our retired Sisters and our mission work in downtown Reading. We are especially grateful to those who have become sponsors, have contributed auction items, or are volunteering to prepare for the event.

I am happy to announce the winners of our Mission Raffle: Anne Marie Corriere ($2,000), Lilia Gonzalez ($1,000), and Helen Truskett ($500). Many people in our global missions will benefit from the raffle’s $23,000 profit.

Recently, in lieu of flowers at funerals, some families have indicated that the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters be the recipients of their memorial gifts. This is a wonderful way to honor a loved one while at the same time supporting a good cause. Call the Development Office, if you have questions.

Thank you for all the good that results from your caring and generous heart! As we move into another new year, we wish you abundant blessings of health, joy, and God’s peace.

Sister Maria Bartos, OSF
Director of Development & Mission Advancement

“Inspired and Energized” by the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters

“What a blessing you have been in my life, and in the lives of so many others!” exclaimed Charles Zola, Ph. D., of Drums, PA who has had a special connection to the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters since his early childhood.

Having grown up across the street from the Sisters’ hospital in Hazleton, Charlie developed a close relationship with the Sisters, not only during his elementary school days at St. Stanislaus, but also throughout his high school years at Bishop Hafey and during his time volunteering at the hospital. With fondness and affection, Charlie recalled one of his favorite early memories—carrying the Sisters’ book bags back to the Convent where, on special occasions, he was invited to see their Chapel!

Upon completing his doctorate at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, Charles acknowledged the impact that the Sisters had on his life in his dissertation.

Charles expresses his gratitude in his own words: “I am so very grateful for the contribution that the Bernardine Sisters made to my primary and secondary education. More importantly, I appreciate their wonderful example of enthusiasm and dedication as teachers since this was something that inspired me to pursue a career in education. It is a long road from being the son of a Bethlehem Steel worker to being a college professor, and the Sisters helped to set me on that course.”

Currently, Dr. Zola is the Assistant to the President for Mission Integration and the Director of the Catholic and Dominican Institute at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, New York, where he also teaches philosophy.

Thank you, Charlie, for being an integral and esteemed part of our Franciscan family! †
Bequests pave the way to ensure that the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters have the means to continue doing God’s work here on earth while providing care for their retired Sisters. The Sisters are most grateful to the family of Sister Mary Joseph Tirpak (above right) for the generous bequest from her first cousin, Regina P. Tirpak. Father Ronald Bowman blesses a plaque in her memory at St. Joseph Villa. We hope you will decide to include our Sisters in your estate plans. Contact Sister Maria Bartos at (484) 334-6815 for more information, or to let her know that you have included the Sisters in your will.