

## A message from Father Mike –

For the last few months there have been announcements in the bulletin regarding the sisters we now have teaching in our school. These have revealed only the tip of the iceberg. I am about to tell you the rest of the story. It is a story of the power of prayer, divine providence and the tenacity of a number of people who worked to make this happen.

Many years ago, our pastor, Monsignor Martin Laughlin, and the school principal, Dr. Kay Sutcliffe, dreamed and hoped for the day when our school would have sisters to bolster our teaching staff. Bishop Baker also was thinking along those lines as he pondered the new high school to be built in southern Beaufort County. During this time, Monsignor was contacted by the Mother Superior of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, to discuss the possibility of providing several sisters to teach at our school. Father Hayden Vaverek, pastor of Holy Family Church, was also involved as he worked with the sisters to set up a summer camp at Holy Family. At this time, the order has 60 women in their community. They live a rigid disciplined life of prayer, teaching and community.

All of this happened before I arrived on the scene in June of 2005. I was here in time for the summer camp. Mother Assumpta and three other sisters came to visit our school while they were in town. They were impressed, but non-committal. Fortunately, our new principal, Dr. Mike Rockers, was also available at that time. Mother wrote to Bishop Baker to say they were considering three locations. St. Francis was at the top of the list because of our proximity to the planned high school. They agreed to start at St. Francis, contingent on our ability to provide suitable lodging and equitable financial arrangements. The bishop asked the pastors of St. Francis and Holy Family to see if it would be possible to establish a residence suitable for communal living.

On February 22, 2006, the sisters announced that they were not coming and were delaying their plans. The bishop gave me permission to continue dialog with Mother Assumpta. With Dr. Rockers' help, we went about to change her decision. Within a week, Mother informed Bishop Baker that she would be sending three sisters to St. Francis. Now the hard work began. We searched around the island for a suitable residence. Through Monsignor, we learned that Kay Sutcliffe and her husband were moving north and their house was for sale. We checked it out and found it to be perfect for our needs. It would house not only the three sisters we hoped to get but also three additional ones if we ever got that lucky. Sister John Dominic came to inspect and found it satisfactory. Negotiations began. Kay was thrilled that we wanted to convert her house into a convent. The Sutcliffes made us a very attractive offer. We were able to purchase the house for \$700,000, with Holy Family contributing \$500,000 and St. Francis \$200,000. The labor and materials required to change the house to a convent began. Many persons were instrumental in setting up the plans to create private and common areas. Sister Kathleen gave a sister's eye to the changes that had to be made, the MacDonald brothers did all the interior carpentry, Hal Wieland, manager of the Thrift Shop, provided furniture and other supplies (as did many parishioners) and Audrey McGovern and Bart and Lois Bubnell were involved in all the details to insure satisfactory results.

Dr. Rockers had the opportunity to provide to Mother Assumpta the needs of our school and Mother matched our needs. The three sisters arrived on August 10<sup>th</sup> to make residence in their new home, their first since joining the order. The new members of our parish are Sister Mary Joseph who teaches the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Sister Maria Rose, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and Sister Ave Maria, Pre-Kindergarten. Their skills in Mathematics and Science are extremely important to the strength of our Middle School. They are happy to be here and we are happy to have them. The Dominican Sisters of Mary have planted the first seeds to promote Catholic education in the Low Country and in this diocese — and we have 3 of the first 7 to go out, right here at St. Francis School.

A lot of people have been involved in making this dream come true — but the one who has been involved the longest and with the greatest fervor is our beloved Monsignor Laughlin. It is truly a blessing for him and for us. We can all rejoice in this great accomplishment.