

# Deep roots at Chatawa for SSND Associates

By Anne Carey & Sister Lupe Valdez, Co-Directors of Associates, Central Pacific Province



*SSND associates from Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky and Texas participated in the August 25, 2019, Closure Ritual for St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Mississippi.*

**F**or SSND associates in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Mississippi, is a second home. It is here where they attended high school, entered the spiranture or participated in retreats. The beautiful grounds and warm southern hospitality of the Sisters quickly carves a special place in one's heart for this hallowed ground.

On August 25, 2019, 50 associates from Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas and Kentucky gathered with the Sisters to say their final goodbyes to the place they love. The gathering included Mass, dinner, a closure prayer followed by the video highlighting the 145 years of SSND presence in the area. The sharing of memories was intertwined in conversation, laughter and tears throughout the day.

Associate Bitsie Simon Scholwinski, from San Antonio, participated in this special event. Bitsie first encountered St. Mary of the Pines in 1954, when she entered the Aspiranture. Bitsie calls St. Mary of the Pines a haven, a place of respite, a source of great life. If Bitsie was within 100 miles of Chatawa, she always took a detour to visit St. Mary of the Pines and the Sisters. Bitsie is one of dozens of SSND associates who spent their formative years at St. Mary of the Pines and it will always hold a special place in their heart.

St. Mary of the Pines has been a gathering place for associates since the former Dallas province established the associate relationship in 1986. Chatawa is known for its beauty, hospitality and slower pace of life. Associates came to this special place to reconnect with the Sisters and their God. Saying goodbye is heart-wrenching, but associates, like the Sisters, know that nothing lasts forever and change can lead to new birth.



*Left to right: Associate leaders Sister Dana Marie Heffner, Debbie Anderson, Sister Lorraine Landry and Christine Ingrassia.*

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For the local group of associates who gathered every month at St. Mary of the Pines, they will use a meeting room at St. James parish in Magnolia, Mississippi. Associate leaders Debbie Anderson and Christine Ingrassia hope that a few Sisters will be able to drive from Covington, Louisiana, to join them on occasion, but they recognize it will not be the same. As the Sisters leave Chatawa, the associates will take on greater leadership in the gatherings, challenging each other to continue living the charism. They also hope to gather with the Sisters at St Anthony's Gardens in Covington several times a year. Their first group gathering in Covington was December 8, when the associates hosted a Christmas party for the Sisters.

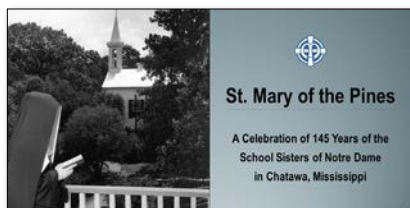
The associates who love St. Mary of the Pines are the pioneers of our times. They are finding new ways of gathering, forming relationships, connecting with Sisters and taking on responsibilities as we enter an age of letting go of infrastructure for the good of the mission. Throughout North America, SSND associates are experiencing the pain of letting go, but we know,

***“All the works of God proceed slowly and in pain; but then their roots are the sturdier and their flowering the lovelier.”***

*Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger*



*Associates from Chatawa, Mississippi, gathered with Sisters at Holy Trinity Parish Hall in Covington, Louisiana, for a Christmas party.*



*Watch a slide show about the history of SSNDs in Chatawa, Mississippi, composed and narrated by Michele Levandoski from the SSND North American Archives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin., available at [ssnd.org/chatawa/](http://ssnd.org/chatawa/).*