Our Providence Moment
Sr. Dianne Heinrich, CDP

On May 6, 2008 at 7:40 pm, when Sr. Frances Lorene called me and said, “Main Building is on fire!” I thought, “Surely, it’s just a small thing and it will be taken care of in a few minutes.” When I walked out of my house in Providence Village on the back of campus and saw the huge flames leaping up into the air from the top of Main Building, I knew this evening was going to test our faith in God’s Provident care for the University and the Congregation of Divine Providence.

When I arrived on the front lawn of the Convent I met several Sisters who were in disbelief that this could be happening. We embraced each other and cried for a few moments about the possibility of losing such a precious piece of our CDP lives and history. I had a great feeling of helplessness as I watched the fire and the only thing I could think of was to gather some students and Sisters in small circles and pray with my whole being that our Provident God would direct this whole evening, protect everyone, save as much of Main Building as possible, and spare Sacred Heart Chapel. It was during this moment of prayer with the students and Sisters that I placed our whole University community, the Congregation, the firefighters, police and all our beautiful buildings into God’s care. We would have to wait and trust that no matter what happened God would provide for us. I felt a new strength that Providence was our sure support in this moment of unfolding destruction and sadness.

As I witnessed this inferno going on for hours, I had to keep looking at the statue of the Blessed Mother, Our Lady of the Lake, on the highest point of Main Building to draw strength. I felt her serene presence and message coming through loud and clear in the midst of the chaotic wind and flames: “Do not be afraid. All will be well. We are here with you.” There was also a moment when I had a strong sense of our CDP ancestors in the Communion of Saints watching over all of us, as well as Main Building and the whole campus. I told Mother Florence Walter who had built Main Building in 1895, “I’m sorry this is happening to your dream. I’m sorry we can’t keep it just as it always was.”

Being a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence leadership on the General Council, I believe that one of our responsibilities is to be the “keepers of the CDP memory” – to help the community remember the original call of Providence to serve others in this unique place. On May 6, I felt the chorus of our CDP ancestors challenging us to remember the founding grace of Our Lady of the Lake which transcends buildings, and to move forward on a new journey of spreading God’s loving care, trusting that Providence would turn everything, even this tragedy, to good. I believe Providence is doing just that everyday since the fire. For that gift, as Blessed John Martin Moye said, “Let us bless Providence!”