

Q: Why did you choose to become a Sister of Providence?

A: I had wanted to be a sister since I was 3 years old. My aunt worked at a Catholic hospital. She would take me there frequently. The Sisters were very, very kind. They were Franciscan sisters from Pittsburgh. My aunt also would take me to Tuesday night devotions at church when I was very little, before I started school actually. I think all of that attracted me to religious life. The sisters I had in grade school were the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. They were founded in Italy and, for the most part, many of the sisters were Italian. They taught in our school, which was primarily an Italian parish. They were just wonderful, lot of fun. Throughout my life there were these really fine sisters, really fine women who were models in many, many ways. In high school, we moved to Anaheim, Calif. In Anaheim, it was the 1960s: sun's out, surf's up! For a couple years, I didn't think a whole lot about religious life. California was fun; it was lovely. Again, it was the 1960s, you know? But, the 1960s also brought with it that movement toward service. President Kennedy had talked about the Peace Corps. There was that whole emphasis on giving to other people. By the time my senior year rolled around, people were talking about what colleges they would go to, etcetera, etcetera. As I thought about my future, that whole notion of religious life came back to me. The sisters who taught me in high school were the Sisters of Providence. It was the first time I met them. I really only knew them for three years because we moved when I had entered my sophomore year. Yet I found them to be dedicated women, certainly. There were a few sisters I was very close to because I was involved in a many extracurricular activities. They said to me, 'Have you thought about joining us.'

I had wanted to join the sisters who taught me in grade school; had wanted to go to their aspirancy. My parents discouraged it because we were moving to California. The aspirancy was in Connecticut. It was probably one of the best decisions my parents ever made. Otherwise, who knows where I would be? I would probably be with this other community of sisters. We were going to go to California and that was it. My dad enrolled me in Marywood High School in Orange, site unseen. It didn't take too long for me to love it, love the Sisters of Providence, know them more and more and become a part of who they were and still are.

As students, we had access to the chapel. Frequently, we would stand outside when sisters were at afternoon prayer just to hear them praying together. It was that culmination of a desire for service, a desire for giving myself to something bigger than myself and, certainly, I really felt something inside me attracting me to it. I call that grace. I didn't call it grace then because I didn't know what to call it. But, many years later, that is what I think it really was: God's Spirit moving within me. I can truly say I have never, ever regretted it. It is the way I have become who I am. It has called on every gift and talent I ever thought I had, and some I didn't know I had.

Q: What do you value most about your ministry opportunities?

A: I think what I most value has been the gift that I have received in getting to know so many people who really want to know more about spirituality, who want to know more

about justice and who God is in their lives. In being on that journey with people and talking with them about it, in teaching or in parish work or even in the ministry I am in now in administration, it helps me to grow. It's made me ask myself the questions that I feel are significant questions about life, future, our world, justice, about peace, non-violence. All the values we proclaim as Sisters of Providence, I find so many people really share in those values and want to know more and move forward with them. It's like an extraordinary partnership that I have felt with people along the way. I think my years of teaching were such a gift in helping younger people discover themselves. Everything was so fresh and new for them. My years of teaching high school were so enriched. My work in Diocesan vocation ministry, while really challenging, was so great because it was an opportunity to help men and women with God's call in their own lives. That helped strengthen my own call and the whole process of discernment. And vocation ministry with the Congregation was such a blessing because I really came to better appreciate this Congregation and helping women to come to know and love what I know and love. Now, in administration for the Congregation, in this position of leadership, the challenges are so very, very different, but I have enjoyed partnering with so many lay people and so many committees and, certainly, with our sisters, really coming to know that we are in this together, we're on this journey together, we're moving forward into the future. Coming to know the sisters on a different level has been the greatest gift of my life.

Q. Can you explain a little more about what you mean by getting to know the sisters on a different level?

A. Through visitation with the sisters, going out and visiting them on their missions at their ministry site, or here at the motherhouse, hearing their stories, learning about their families, learning about their ministerial history, talking with them about their joys, their sorrows, their hopes for the future for the Congregation, their hopes for the future of the world, it just gives you this opportunity to come to know people and to love them in a completely different way. When you know someone's story, you can't help but love them. That's been such a gift.

Q. Why would a woman today find joining the Sisters of Providence an attractive choice?

A. Because if that is where she belongs, she'll know she can become the best person she can be, because religious life, living in community, really does call for every gift and talent you have and some you didn't know you have. And because we encourage one another on this God-quest, there is support for the God-quest. There is a sharing of values, one with another. There's the ministry that we do together for the people of God. So, she will be stretched. She will be enriched. She will be surprised. I hope she would be happy because most of the sisters I know are happy. We are who we are. We're a group of women who have come together to serve God, make Providence known, and we have said we would do that through works of love, mercy and justice. We're in it together.

Q. What was your most defining moment as a Sister of Providence?

A. One was an opportunity I had to go to Mexico many, many years ago. I was part of a group that did an immersion experience. It really opened my eyes to another part of the world, another way that so many other people live. To really be immersed in that kind of poverty and that kind of struggle that people were having, really changed a lot of my thinking. Another defining moment was having been diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a terrible, terrible year of my life in that I had horrible side effects from all of the treatments. Even from the surgery, I had side effects. It was a pretty serious cancer. You do think about life and death and what it all means. Has your life been worth something? Have you made a difference? What really is important? That's the bottom line question. It was clear to me that the only thing that really matters is loving and being loved. Nothing else truly matters. I came away from that experience with an extraordinary sense of gratitude, realizing the love I had been given through the Congregation, certainly through my family, God's love for me and, while I haven't been successful at it all the time, I was able to love. It really was defining. It helped me put things into perspective through the years. It was at the millennium. I was diagnosed in 1999. I celebrated the millennium with no hair and being pretty sick. In fact, I wasn't sure I would see the millennium. I really wasn't sure.

Q. You seem to have a special connection to the sisters serving in Taiwan and China. Why is that important to you? What opportunities do you see there?

A. As part of my responsibilities on the leadership team, I'm the general officer liaison to the mission in Taiwan. That has been a wonderful experience in that it has helped me better appreciate who they are as members of the Congregation. It has influenced me to try to bring that awareness to the rest of the Congregation. As a result, we did a Mission in Asia summer that really helped our sisters better know, understand and appreciate the mission there, the ministries that go on there, the contributions of the Taiwan Mission over the years has made us who we are. Certainly, I've developed a relationship with the missionary Sisters of Providence through their general superior, Sister Maria Lo. I have learned the connection we have with them - truly we are sisters; it has been such a gift. I had the opportunity to do a talk with them about the charism of Providence. There is so much that we share in common with them. Some of them have been to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to visit and the opportunity to bring them to their roots was wonderful. I think that the Chinese culture has so much to offer us in the west that I really want us to know it even more so we can better appreciate it and it can become part of our lives. Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College offered a Chinese language class. I am taking that class. The language is very difficult, but it helps me better appreciate what we ask of our Asian sisters when we ask them to learn English. The languages are so different. It's been fun, it's been enjoyable, but it's been difficult. Whether or not I will ever speak Chinese, I don't know, but I have extended my vocabulary beyond the 14 words I once knew. Maybe I'm now up to 28. I'm not sure. I think it's important to make the attempt. I've learned a lot. I appreciate the sisters there. I have a great affection for them actually.

Q. Please finish this question. Sister Paula is ...

A. Sister Paula is a creative and fun-loving person who is blessed with great friends, a wonderful family and the best Congregation anyone could ever have.

Q. What role does prayer have in your life?

A. For me, prayer is the root of my life. It helps to put things into perspective. It's a substance that feeds my inner spirit. My morning quiet time is really important to me to help me get through the day with some sense of focus. My shared prayer time with the sister with whom I live (Sister Marie McCarthy) is challenging; it's a time of really being together in a way that I know helps each of us grow. The other thing I want to say about prayer is Sister Marie is in her room during her quiet prayer time and I am in my room during my quiet prayer time, but in some way I sense a connection during that time. Of course, here at the motherhouse, sharing the Eucharist and liturgy with the larger community is a way that helps me be united with the Congregation in this extraordinary gift of sacrament. One of the other things that is important to me about prayer is to have some variety. My quiet time is usually contemplative sitting time. Reading the scriptures, listening to some music and being in God's creation are some of the ways that I vary my prayer. That is important to me. Artistic expression is really important to me too.

Q. How important to you is the community lifestyle that religious congregations have to offer?

A. Really important. Being in community can rub off some of the rough edges because you're bumping up against one another all the time. There are happy days and there are some challenging days. I really have to say it has helped me become the best person I could become. That's ongoing. I certainly have not arrived at that, but I feel that the community really helps me with that. Clearly, it offers me the challenge to be in mission. It offers me the challenge to grow in faith. It's the support. It's a community of faith-filled women who are together on this journey.

Q. How much influence does Saint Mother Theodore Guerin have in your life?

A. I was in high school when I first learned about Mother Theodore. We talked a lot about her on foundation day, but we didn't really say a lot more about her at any other time of the year. Based on my time in the Congregation, we learned community history, but we didn't say a lot about her. I didn't feel like I knew her until maybe 15 years ago, probably more like 25 years ago, when I really started reading her "Journals and Letters." I was kind of intrigued by her. Certainly, when it got close to time for her beatification, I think, as a Congregation, we really came to know her in a new and different way. For me, she is a model. When I read her "Journals and Letters," I often feel like she is writing directly to me. When we quote her, I feel like those are just for me. She's talking directly to me. I had the opportunity to visit her home in Etables, France, and to walk along the Breton shore where she walked. That was important for me because it helped me see her as a real person. She was not just the foundress of our Congregation. She was a woman who lived and breathed and faced all the challenges life had to offer as a young person, as she grew up, in religious life. She became very, very real to me. I pray to her often. I talk

to her often. I really do want other people to gain strength and courage from her. I think she really has a great deal to offer people.

Q. What is the most important thing in your life right now?

A. Beyond all of the things like God and community? Let me just say all of those things: spirituality, the community, family and friends. Those are all givens. Those are really important to me. Right now, one of the most important things to me is getting through the renovation of Providence Hall, our main residence for sisters who are retired. It really has occupied a great deal of my time and energy over the last couple years. I am just really eager to see it ended. Another thing that is really important for me right now is my Mom. My Mom is 82 and she's not in the best of health. She's in Oregon. I guess I judge what is important to me by the kind of energy I give to something. I'm concerned about her a lot.

Q. What world events have had the most impact on you?

A. Which ones to choose? Probably the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on Sept. 11, 2001. It occurred a couple of days after our first installation (as general officers). Because it changed the world, I think it had a huge impact on us because it changed the tenor of things. I think we were convinced more than ever that the world needed the assurance that God's Providence really does never fail, that God's Providence really is with us, God's love is with us, and that nothing can separate us from that love. It's how I began my time in leadership with that event. That had a very big impact. President Barack Obama's election had an effect on me, too, certainly for its historical significance, but also because he is a person who governs not only with his mind, but also with his heart. Despite the difficulties he is having and has had, he's an incredibly interesting and dynamic person. Growing up, the greatest world event for me was the Vietnam War. Persons I went to school with were either serving in Vietnam or protesting Vietnam. It was one of the first times that I was so aware of any event happening outside of our borders. We watched it every night. I just remember that there was a flip flop in the country.

Q. What gives you your most pleasure or satisfaction?

A. I think it's probably when I know other people are pleased and satisfied, when other people are peaceful. The other thing that gives me pleasure and satisfaction is a job well done. On a personal level I get great pleasure and satisfaction doing anything artistic and creative or crafty; making cards, creating jewelry, doing watercolor.

Q. Is there anything that has caused you perpetual concern?

A. It probably is a good thing that I was never a parent. I give enough worry to my niece and nephew as they grow up. I can't even imagine what it would have been like if I were a parent. My family is small. I have one brother, a sister-in-law and one niece and one nephew. I just worry about them all the time as they grow up. So I think there is a reason

I am not a parent. I would be just a worry-wart mother. Something else that gives me perpetual concern is that we never learn a lesson from war. In that book called “The March of Folly,” the author recounts all of these wars we have engaged in on this planet. It really is a march of folly because it never really resolves anything. It is repeated over and over again. We never learn that it’s futile, it’s useless. It doesn’t really lead us anywhere. As a society, as a human race, we just haven’t caught on to that.

Q. What gives you hope?

A. The niece and nephew I worry about all the time, people like them really do give me hope. So many of their values really are the values that will move the world forward. Basically, I think most people are good, and that gives me hope.

Q. Do you have a favorite vacation spot?

A. The last few years, I have gone to Door County, Wis., and it has become one of my favorite vacation spots. That’s kind of a newly discovered favorite vacation spot. Before that, it would have been anywhere near the ocean.

Q. You have some craft hobbies. How did you get interested? What kinds of crafts are most attractive for you?

A. All of my life, I’ve been involved in some sort of art or craft. I was an art education major in undergraduate school. I was primarily into painting. But I soon found that my real desire was creating in crafts. One of the more recent ones is card-making. Every time I do a card, it’s like a little canvas. I just like to look at that little canvas and see what I can do with it, see what I can create with that little, flat piece of paper. My jewelry making really came about through Sister Jan Craven who had taken a class. She thought it was fun. So I’ve been making jewelry for several years. Whenever I do those things, I can lose myself, completely and entirely. All of my cares and worries fade away. That’s also true with watercolor. Just the color can pull me into it.

Q. If you had three wishes that could be granted to you, what would they be?

A. I really do wish the cause and cure for cancer could be found. I wish we could eradicate violence. I wish I could really know God’s presence and that I would live out of that knowing. That I could live out of what I know to be God’s life, and hopefully, live out of love. And if I had a fourth wish, it would be that the Providence Hall renovation goes really smoothly.

Q. What would be the one thing you most want people to remember about you?

A. I wish they would remember that I tried to be a caring person. It’s something I am conscious of a lot. I could have given that person more time. I could have given them more sympathy. I could have given more of myself.

Speed round

Q. What do you like best about Saint Mary-of-the-Woods?

A. It's natural beauty and the people who are here.

Q. When I am not officially at work or involved in ministry, you're most likely to see me ...

A. Crafting, reading or being with friends.

Q. On weekends, I love too ...

A. Read the Sunday newspaper, sleep in late.

Q. I am passionate about ...

A. Life.

Q. What the world needs now ...

A. Love, sweet love

Q. Name one thing most people don't know about you.

A. For a good portion of my life, I was a tent camper.

Q. Name one thing you liked best about being a kid.

A. Being able to go to silly movies, and being carefree about life.

Q. What would you like to hear God say when you arrive in heaven?

A. The line that comes to me is from the song of songs: "Come now, my lovely one, come."

Q. What is the highlight of your week?

A. Every week is so different in this ministry, it's hard to say what the highlight is. Honestly, there are no two minutes the same, let alone weeks that are the same. It's probably the time when I can talk to my niece and nephew. They bring me into another whole aspect of life. They are talking about their schools, their dates, their lives. It's a change from my life.

Q. Have you ever met anyone famous?

A. Yes. Once, I had breakfast with Jimmy Carter at the White House along with about 50 other people. I met Luciano Pavaroti on an airplane, and spoke with him later at the airport in Rome.

Q. What is your least favorite chore?

A. Doing the laundry.

Favorites

Web site: Google Earth

Food: Italian, of course!

Flowers, plants: Calla lilies

Book: So many, but my top three are Eat, Pray Love; Under the Tuscan Sun; Kristin Lavransdatter; or any good mystery.

Movie: A really old one: Magnificent Obsession

TV show: Dancing with the Stars

Vacation spot: any place near water

Hobby: card-making and beading

Sport: fishing

Music/song: I'm eclectic in this area: I like almost all genres, except hard rock

Pizza topping: mushrooms

Quote: Each of us is an angel with just one wing. We can fly only if we hold on to one another – Italian proverb

Holiday: Easter

Dessert: any kind of cake

Time of day: sunset

Season: Autumn

Actor/actress: Meryl Streep

Childhood activity: playing school

Course in School: English Literature with Sister Clarice Asbury, SP

Saint: Mother Theodore Guerin, of course, but Francis of Assisi is a close second

Zoo animal: The gorgeous flamingoes at the San Diego Zoo.

Outdoor activity: walking on the beach

Least favorite food: okra

My best friend says ... I'm a multi-tasker

Favorite artist: Wassili Kadinsky, and most of the great artists of the Renaissance, Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

Favorite building: Chrysler Building, New York City

If you could invite any one person to dinner, who would it be? Oprah Winfrey, and then convince her to make a sizeable donation to our ministries.

Something I've always wanted to do ... Live in Italy for a year or so.