

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

A. I was taught by the Sisters of Providence in high school and in college, particularly at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College. I was inspired by individuals whom I knew who were strong women and women devoted to prayer. I thought about religious life and I thought about the Sisters of Providence. I didn't even really consider any other congregation.

**Q. What prompted you to think about religious life?**

A. That's a mystery to me. It was a sense that I had. This was a way for me to be faithful. When I didn't expect to be thinking about it, I found myself thinking about it. When I tried not to think about it, I found myself thinking about it. Eventually, I came to an understanding that I would have to investigate it if I was going to be honest with myself. When I investigated, I found that I was invited to continue the journey and that I was supported. My family supported me. My friends supported me, both inside the congregation and out. Not from the very beginning, but with each step along the way it felt like the right thing to do. When I came out of college I taught for a year. I was told that I ought to consider religious life at that point. I decided to get away from the Sisters of Providence because I didn't want to go down that path. They got me anyway.

I taught junior high and I was not prepared to be with junior high students. If I had had a better first year of teaching, I might not have entered when I did. At the end of that year, I thought, "Well, I have to do something else." It seemed like the right time for me. The group I entered with, we were all in college at the same time. I was pretty close to some of those people. At least there was safety in numbers. After my novitiate, I taught high school English for 11 years and loved it. I loved teaching. I didn't love junior high. It wasn't right for me.

**Q. You've had ministries other than teaching? Why the change to a more pastoral opportunity?**

A. I've always been in music in some way or other. My first degrees were in English. At some point, I realized I was continually involved in music, parish music, particularly as a volunteer. I was finding a lot of fulfillment in music. I didn't have the skills that I wanted to be proficient in my volunteer music ministry. I really began to look at that as a possibility. I was allowed to go back to study to get a degree in church music and liturgy. Once I finished that degree, I worked in parishes full time.

**Q. What do you value most about your ministry opportunities?**

A. I've been grateful to ...I love teaching and to be able work with young people who grow in maturity and have success...I taught for a number of years at Providence-St. Mel

in Chicago. We taught many students who were the first in their families to pursue any kind of education. Certainly, in many cases, they were the first in their family to go to college. And to see young people really struggling to be successful, and to be able to provide them with support was really exciting to me. I enjoy helping people learn and figuring out ways to help people get the knowledge that they want and need. In parish ministry I have over and over again, been struck and humbled by people and their commitment to ministry, whether it was a fulltime ministry for them or ... It's a wonderful thing to be in a parish and be involved in people's lives at high points of their lives, to be there for the baptism of their children, the celebration of marriages, to try to be of support to them as they bury their beloved family members. All of that is just very special to be a part of. Now that I am here at the Woods, I am really very grateful for the opportunity to worship with the community and to be in the midst of such fidelity. I have always been struck the model of faithfulness that is alive here.

**Q. It wasn't very long ago that you were teaching in Chicago. Is it surprising that so many students were among the first in their families to seek formal education, or seize the opportunity to advance to higher education?**

A. It was rough there. I was not in another situation where parents were generally as supportive of education. It was a tough area. Parents worked more than one job to keep their young people in school. Many of them were not educated at all. They wanted something better for their youngsters. Now, when I was there, it was a junior high, too, grades seven through 12. Now, they start in first grade. They would come to us from public schools and their skills were way below normal. Our goal from the very beginning was to get them ready for college. We could guarantee you, if you stick with the program, you'll be ready for college. It might not be in four years. It might be longer, but your skills will be where they need to be. It was a great experience for me, hard work, but a great experience. One youngster, who transferred in as a sophomore, was a basketball player and he ran track. In his first semester, he didn't have his grades. He was ineligible. He came to me and said, "Can you help me figure out what grades I need in each class so I can be eligible next semester?" I said, "I am here every day until 4:30 or 5 o'clock. If you want to come here and study after your classes are over, you can do that. If you need some help on something, I can help you or I can find someone who can help you." For the rest of his high school career, he studied in my classroom until 4:30 or 5 o'clock every night. He became eligible, graduated and ended up with a doctorate in sociology and is a professor now. That was the kind of thing we were able to witness.

**Q. Why would a woman today find being a Sister of Providence an attractive life opportunity?**

A. I think they would find it attractive because we are really united around the mission. We are supportive of one another in our mission, the mission, of course, promoting love, mercy and justice. Anyone who has a sense of dedication to mission, I think, would find like-minded people and people who are supportive in the process. It's a gift to be able to come together with other sisters, and stay together, live together and work together. We're not all the same. It's not a lock-step sort of thing. Within our diversity, I think

there is a great deal of strength. The gifts that I don't have someone else will have, and I can share.

**Q. You have seen a lot of changes in the Congregation since you became a member. Do you want to share some thoughts on that topic?**

A. There are changes of degree, moreso than for the sisters who lived with and implemented changes after the Second Vatican Council. We're smaller than we were when I entered. We're older than we were when I entered. At the same time, I think that we are coming to a better understanding of what unites us. I wasn't part of the Congregation when the external things like habit and schedule provided unity. I think we struggled for a while once those externals were gone. What really does matter is how can we be one and be so diverse? That question has become more central to us. Our experience with mission and our commitment to that mission has become the element of unity for us.

**Q. Sister Lisa is ...**

A. Doing the best she can at just about everything she wants to do. I think maybe the better answer is Sister Lisa is happy with what she is doing, with her life and with her ministry.

**Q. What role does prayer have in your life?**

A. I know that my prayer with the community and with those whom I live is very important. Especially, liturgical prayer is central to my being here. My personal time of prayer kind of keeps me in balance, what ever balance there is in my life. The form of prayer that is most my own is music-making. Music is never a chore to me. It is my profession, but it is never work. The high point of my day is to be able to get to the organ. The prayer aspect of music-making is a highlight. It's fun, too, but it is how I pray.

**Q. Some might say you have a unique perspective with two separate prayer lives, your own personal life and organizing and preparing prayer for others. Does one tug at the other, or do they work together?**

A. I think they do work together. It took me a long time to get to this point. I have been working in music and liturgy for a long time now. It took me a long time to figure out that if I work hard enough to prepare for liturgy, then, in that moment, I'm not working, I'm praying. To me, when a minister prepares fully enough, then, in the liturgy itself, he or she can get out of the way and let the prayer happen. That doesn't mean when I'm playing the organ, I'm not concentrating on what I'm doing. If I'm well enough prepared for that liturgy, then I can lead prayer at the same time I can pray personally.

**Q. How important to you is the community lifestyle.**

A. It's very important to me. Because of my ministry, I lived a good distance from other sisters when I was in Kentucky. So, I lived on my own and my community life was a matter of consciously reaching out to be in contact with other Sisters of Providence and share. Now, I'm living in a local community where there are six of us and it has been a real gift to me. A big part of it is the complimentary part: we are different, one from another, but we're respectful of those differences and there is a genuine concern for one another.

**Q. Have you had any SP role models?**

A. I have. As I said earlier, some of the women who taught at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College when I was a student. That's when I began to understand women religious as leaders, as professionals, as friends, and as models. Any number of the women I knew at that time were role models to me. Almost every day, I am struck by the fidelity of the women on this campus, the faithfulness and the holiness of the women here.

**Q. How much influence has Saint Mother Theodore Guerin had in your life?**

A. I love to read her "Letters and Journals." I think she had a wonderful sense of humor. I think she had a little bit of a smart aleck streak. I appreciate that because I do too and it gives me hope that there is a chance for me. Her wisdom is remarkable, her faithfulness, her ability to deal with adverse situations and troubled to such a degree as she was so often, to be facing the things she faced, and remain faithful, optimistic and hopeful, that's a gift that I aspire to. I can't get over it. It brings me joy.

**Q. Has your life turned out as you might have imagined?**

A. Not in a hundred years. I really never had an intention of being a sister. It just so happened that I was friends with (Sister) Sue Pietrus (RIP); we were friends in choir and we entered together and we'd have conversations like, "How long do you think we have to stay before we leave and people say we didn't give it a chance?" Of course, I'm still here. Sue was in 33 years before she died. I didn't think it would work. I don't know what I thought. I thought I might be sent home. I thought I met get fed up and go. I don't know what I thought might happen. I'm certainly glad those things didn't happen because I can't imagine it being any other way.

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

A. Well, the obvious answer would be God, the Congregation, my relationships with my friends and my family. I am passionate about my ministry, and I'm passionate about music.

**Q. Where did you develop this keen passion for music?**

A. I was in a musical household. My mother was very musical. If we wanted to eat at the Stallings' dinner table, you had to play some kind of musical instrument. We all did because we liked sitting at the dinner table. When I was in college, I sang and I enjoyed singing with the college chorale and madrigals. When I got out of school, I was involved in music as a pastime, as a hobby. Musicians talk about people being technically proficient, or being musical. In the best of both worlds, a person is both. I had some native musicality, but I didn't have all of the training I needed. When I went back to school, it was almost like getting my fingers and my brain to catch up to my musical nature. When both things came together, when I could sense what I wanted the music to sound like and also to have good skills to make that happen. That's when it all caught fire for me. It doesn't always work, but it works enough of the time to keep me satisfied and wanting to do more.

**Q. What were you like as a child?**

A. I was playful. I was a tomboy. I always played sports. I guess I was a little bit of a smart aleck, well, a lot of a smart aleck. I was a happy child. I had a very happy childhood. I have always had a good time. We all played sports of one kind or another. I played tennis competitively. Women's sports were very different then. The high school didn't have women's team. Catholic churches had CYO teams.

**Q. What is your fondest childhood memory?**

A. I loved the dinner table. We all had dinner together every night. There were a lot of us. My father had a very low tolerance for confusion. Each of us had a turn to speak. When we sat down at the table, Mother and Dad would talk about had happened in their days. Then we would go around the table and each child would come up with something important that happened to them that day. It sounds like it might not have been a positive environment for children, but we had great fun and we always knew we would have a chance. You didn't have to fight for the floor to say what you wanted to say and others would respond to it. It was kind of like being called on in class, except that it was your family. I learned a lot at the table. My dad was an engineer in the construction business. He would talk to us about building bridges and driving piles and the kinds of things engineers talk about. You never knew what the conversation was going to be about, but there was always going to be one and you were always going to have a part in it.

**Q. What would people like to know about your family?**

A. We're very different, one from the other. We're very spread out, too. We don't get together very often. There are six of us and we are in six different states. When we do get together, it was like we were never apart. My mother is still alive. Some of my siblings, I think, were we not related, somehow our paths would have crossed in life and we would have been friends. Others, we are so different that we would never have had occasion to meet one another. I guess that's kind of the mystery of it. The family bond is really

stronger than what we have in common as individuals, which is not unlike religious community. Our diversity is so great but the bond is still there.

**Q. Of all the things you learned from your parents, what do you believe is the most valuable?**

A. From my father, I learned how to work hard and to enjoy a job well done. From my mother, I think I learned to pay attention to people and to try to make them feel comfortable.

**Q. Do you have a philosophy of life that you could share?**

A. It's a good Earth that we have. It's a good Earth and there is so much opportunity for happiness in life, joy in life. It's all a gift.

**Q. What gives you your most pleasure and satisfaction?**

A. Playing music. That's the one thing that gives me both pleasure and satisfaction. I like a lot of other things. I love to be active. A lot of people think they should work out because they should. I love to work out. I bike, I walk, just be moving. That's not so much the satisfaction as pleasure. Pleasure and satisfaction together, hands down, playing the organ.

**Q. Why the organ?**

A. It's a fascinating instrument. It is a collaboration. The builder is an artist. You try to bring your sense of artistry to it to work with the sound and kind of unlock the potential of the instrument itself. The composer enters into it with another level of artistry, then, again the player's ability to translate the notes on the page to music. In church music, you really collaborate with the congregation because you try to play in such a way to unleash the music that is there. All of that is important to me. It's a little bit like a combination of art and sports. Your hands are going. Your feet are going. Your brain is going. It's a physical challenge, especially when you are learning to play the instrument. That's intriguing to me too. And, the variety of sounds that can be made with an organ, everything from the gentlest, quiet sounds to shaking the windows and floor. I love the whole thing.

**Q. Have there been any causes in society that you have found disturbing?**

A. The whole trend of consumerism is bothersome to me. That sense of relationships between people being reduced to transactions is bothersome. I think there is consumerism, to some extent, in worship in that some people come to worship expecting to receive something instead of expecting to enter into a worshipping body. Consumerism, ultimately to me, seems dehumanizing. It reduces our value to what we can do or bring to another person instead of who we are.

**Q. What gives you hope?**

A. I've had the opportunity to be around people with great consistency in their lives who can make the best of a bad situation, who can transform their surroundings and situations they are in for the better and who are willing to work to transform other people for the better. I'm always aware of the goodness of people.

**Q. Any vacation spots?**

A. Every summer I spend time going on a rollercoaster tour. It's my absolute favorite thing to do on vacation. There's a great park in Sandusky, Ohio. That's my favorite spot. I go by myself and spend a day and go from rollercoaster to the next until I have ridden them all. Then I get in my car and go home. I know that people probably think I am insane because I stand in line by myself and the kids are saying, "Who is that white-haired woman?" It's like my shadow self or something. You're totally out of control. It's very freeing for me. I love to do it and I do it every year.

**Q. Any crafts, hobbies or activities outside of your ministries?**

A. I love biking and being outdoors. I'm not a gardener. I do like to be out and active.

**Q. Have you ever done any genealogy work?**

A. A little. Both of my mother's and father's families were part of the Catholics who came to this part of the country, Kentucky, from Maryland when they couldn't practice Catholicism in Maryland. A whole settlement of people went to Central Kentucky around Bardstown. Then, from there, families migrated to Western Kentucky. My father's family ended up going to New Mexico and coming back. I've come from this long line of Kentucky Catholics.

**Q. You play a lot of structured music. What do you play when you want to let your hair down and let it roll? What do you play for fun?**

A. I really do love playing hymns. I try to play them in such a way that they music reflects the text. That is something that I really enjoy doing, changing the style of play or changing the harmonization according to what the text says. In a way, to paint the text with a style of music. It sounds pretty pragmatic for a hymn player to say that, but that is something that I really enjoy.

**Q. I noticed on your information sheet that a favorite childhood activity was playing with plastic cowboy figures.**

A. That's right. I had a whole basket full of those things. I had fences and barns and horses and all of that. I would set them up and play for the whole day. If my Mom would have to go someplace, she would take me and the cowboys. I would set them up and I was satisfied for an entire day. I guess I thought I could grow up to be a cowboy or

something. Somewhere along the line I figured out that wasn't going to work. My Dad was raised on ranch, so maybe that was the connection. But no one else in my family had this passion, but, boy, that's what I did.

### **Quick connections**

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

A. The beauty of the seasons.

**Q. On my day off I love to ...**

A. I love to read or take a bike ride.

**Q. I'm passionate about ...**

A. My ministry.

**Q. What the world needs now ...**

A. Vision. I think we need to see that things could be different and better than they are right now.

**Q. Name one thing you miss about being a child.**

A. Playing outside after supper.

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

A. That I parachuted from a plane.

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

A. Ahhh, I've been waiting for you.

**Q. What is your biggest pet peeve?**

A. Pessimism.

**Q. What is the highlight of your week?**

A. The highlight of my day is lunch. The highlight of my week is Sunday.

**Q. What is your least favorite chore?**

A. Laundry



**Q. If you could invite three people to dinner, who would they be?**

A. Saint Mother Theodore, J.S. Bach and Pope John XXIII.

**Favorites**

Current ministry: Coordinator of Liturgical Music

Years in Congregation: 35

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Food: Vegetables

Book: Whatever I'm reading at the moment

Movie: Wizard of Oz

TV show: Iron Chef America

Vacation spot: Cedar Point amusement park, the roller coaster capital

Recreation: Playing music

Sport: Football

Animal: Cat

Pizza topping: Mushrooms

Holiday: Thanksgiving

Dessert: Bread pudding

Time of day: Putting my head on the pillow

Season: Spring

Childhood activity: Playing with plastic cowboy figures

Hero/heroine: Dorothy Day

Course in school: American Literature or music theory

Saint: Mother Theodore, of course; next, Cecilia

Least favorite course in school: Calculus

Worse movie I've ever seen: Plan 9 From Outer Space

My best friend says I'm ... compulsive, but funny

If I weren't an SP, I'd be ... sad