

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

A. That's a good question. Three generations of the Mundy family ahead of me were Sisters of Providence so I heard about the Sisters of Providence a lot. I've often said I really believe I'm here, not so much by my own choosing, but those sisters who prayed for me before I was ever born. They prayed for the next generation to consider religious life within this community just as I have prayed for the generation after me. Being on this campus, and coming to visit the campus, there was something about being welcomed, about being at home. I came to the Aspirancy for high school and felt pulled in. During that time Sister Helena, my Dad's first cousin, was the one who really said to me, "Have you thought about being a Sister?" I chose to say, "yes" to her and to this vocation. I've always had a sense that it was right for me to be a member of this Congregation.

Q. Did you come to the Aspirancy because it was a good school, or because you thought you wanted to be a Sister of Providence?

A. I knew the Aspirancy was for women interested in religious life. And, I was interested. It might have been that where I grew up there was no Catholic high school and I wanted that. More than anything, Mom loved the Sisters of Providence and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from early on in her life and it was her love for the Sisters and the Woods that encouraged me to check it out. It really is a mystery how it all happened.

Q. What do you value most about the ministry opportunities that you have had?

A. Oh, my. I've had terrific opportunities. Obviously, the people I worked with. I loved my ministry in the inner city, in rural life. I've done education. I've done pastoral work and internal ministry within the community in provincial leadership and as director of novices. Without exception, I have loved all my ministries. I guess it has to do with the relationships that are developed in ministry. No matter where I have been, from my first ministry forward, I would say people have given me the great privilege of hearing their stories. Sister Catherine Marie Quarters (RIP), with whom I lived with at St. Anthony in Indianapolis in the 1970s once said to me, "Mary, do you think you could ever open the door (of the convent) without saying, "Hi, how are you?" She teased me how the mail man even told me what was going on in his life. I've often had a sense that it is not so much what one does in ministry but it is the way one lives out our charism of love, mercy, justice in what we are doing. Probably my favorite ministry was working here (at SMW) in initial formation. That was very meaningful and rich. It was very God-centered and mission driven. I believe so much in this community that I love, just love, and helping people get to know us was a marvelous privilege.

Q. Your current ministry is as a pastoral associate. What does that mean? Why is it important to you?

A. Right now my main focus is doing a 10-week series with a group of 20-25 women. It's called "Creating Sabbath Space." It's like a retreat. It's bringing people together to come to know themselves and God. One of the women said, "This is really good because we are going to deeper places." I like that because it's asking the questions, pondering spirituality. I love being a spiritual director and helping people know more deeply what they already know. I appreciate my time in hospitals and health care facilities and with shut-ins, often because of the wisdom of the elderly. I love working with our liturgical ministers, my favorite being the work with lectors. I want people to stand at the ambo and proclaim the Scripture as if they *really* believed it. Additionally, hospitality is central to parish life. People need to know from the moment they get out of their cars in the parking lot that they are welcome and it's a safe place to be. For some, it's an uncomfortable place, a difficult place. Every single one of them needs to know they are valued and I'll do my best and encourage others to be hospitable. They need to hear: YOU...ARE...CHURCH! Finally, I sense that part of my ministry is to staff persons. I am the oldest person on staff. It's not in my job description but I clearly know it's very important to have time for staff who want/need to talk about something important to them.

Q. Why would a woman today find being a Sister of Providence an attractive lifestyle choice?

A. Why wouldn't she! Well, it's certainly a place for women to be very proud to be women. They can stand very tall for who they are. Their voices can be heard. I think their voices are important. There is something humongous that has to do with community and being a voice with others, of being in actions with the support of other people. It's the whole mission thing. I like us and apparently others see that we love us! My niece Emily said to me after our family was at an SP function when she was a little girl, "I want to be a Sister of Providence." My brother prompted her, "Tell Aunt Mary why you want to be a Sister of Providence." Her reply: "Because you love each other so much." What she witnessed was all of us so glad to see each other. She felt the connecting energy of women who have purpose and meaning in their lives, who love one another, trust one another and help each other become more real. I'd never be as authentic as I am today if not for people in this community who treasure me enough to put a mirror up in front of me and help me become more of who I really am. I don't have to be somebody I'm not. In my experience when you come to know yourself as a Beloved of God, you can like yourself a lot! Humility and truthfulness flow from that. I believe women need to give themselves time to be attentive to what God might be asking. It's helpful for them to have an open space in their hearts or their minds so it's not too cluttered. God needs to have space to come in. They might find that the invitation to religious life is still a very, very important way to be in service, to make a difference in the world. It's a great life. Not an easy one, but a great one.

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

A. Becoming a Sister of Providence seemed like a natural progression for me...at least until I was in my early 30s and I met a wonderful young gentleman while giving a vocation talk in a parish where he served in youth ministry. How's that for God's humor! Actually, it wasn't this person as much as it was the questions and concerns that relationship stirred within me. Eventually, I came to a realization that I could be a good wife. I could be a good mother. I would need those very same qualities to be a good vowed religious woman. Claiming these

realities freed me to choose religious life again and deepen my commitment as a Sister of Providence. Running away from my questions and concerns would have been a big mistake! They were so important in helping me truly define myself as a woman and as a Sister of Providence. I think this man was an agent of Providence and to this day I thank God for him having been in my life!

Q. Complete this sentence. Sister Mary is ...

A. A very happy person.

Q. What role does prayer have in your life?

A. Prayerful living is absolutely the center and core of my every breath, in a sense. It is about an awareness of God's presence in this room right now, in the rain this afternoon, in a pastoral visit I had yesterday, in the sipping of coffee with a friend this morning. It is God's presence in the conversations. Yesterday (when the interview occurred) in hospice with a woman who was very, very ill, I didn't stop to "say prayers" with her, but yet I did. The whole time was filled with a sense of God being right there with us and I talked with her about God's presence and faithfulness to her. I do see an importance in saying prayers with others and uniting our voices, however. I think gesture and ritual are important, too. But, I think living is prayer...or at least can be. I see God in the sunrise and the awakening dawn while facing east in my morning prayer space. God always shows up. So do I. So does another day.

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

A. She has been and is very much part of my life! It goes back to my childhood days of coming to the Woods when we were kids and going to the crypt in the church to ask Mother Theodore for favors. We children certainly had a great awareness that Mother Theodore was special; the manner in which our parents and the sisters approached the crypt let us know this was a holy place; Mother Theodore was a holy person. I had the most serious and intimate conversations with Mother Theodore, however, during the seven years that I was director of novices. Most mornings I got up early to sit in a corner of our novitiate community room for prayer and quiet. I remember well one particular morning. I had been talking to Mother Theodore while searching her "Journals and Letters" for an insight about how to address a particular concern I had with one of the novices. It was when I said to her, "This is one of your novices, too" that I sensed the presence of Mother Theodore sitting on the couch across from me. She spoke kindly and directly to me asking, "Mary, do you love that novice? Does she know that you care about her? If she believes your love her and have concern for her, you can say about anything to her." How relieved I was and how much easier it was to speak challenging words with love! So, yes, she has been a great influence in my life. Her picture hangs in my ministry office and in my home. A desk calendar of her quotes is next to my computer on the credenza at the office. It's in church ministry that I look most to her for advice at this time in my life. Her words and those of Catherine of Siena guide me quite often. Both of them suggest I pray for the courage to listen and the courage to speak.

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

A. Other than God, it really would be my community. My sabbatical year was a monumental turning point for me. Since then I really have good balance in my life. I work hard, but I also generally now have sufficient time for myself. I deliberately take lots of time each morning for “sitting and sipping coffee with God.” I know God’s presence in my home when I’m reading a novel, preparing a presentation, cooking a meal; all of that gives me a calmness in my ministry and in my time with others. And, my community has always held great importance to me. Recently the pastor with whom I work said to me, “Mary, we’ve always known that community is your first priority. We knew that from the day you came for an interview. I support you in that and suggest you try to get away and connect with your community one weekend a month.” I live singly for the time being as I’m the only SP in this geographical area. So, I connect with at least some of our sisters every month. A number of Providence Associates live nearby and that broadens the tent of Providence on a local level.

Q. What were you like as a child?

A. I am the second child, the oldest daughter. I’m one of four children who all thought we were Dad’s favorite. Being Dad’s favorite gave me lots of self confidence. We lived on a farm and we worked hard. We had a huge garden and what was referred to as a “truck patch” where extras were grown and often sold or given to our pastor, the sisters, and people in need. We harvested what seemed to be huge patches of strawberries, potatoes and tomatoes. Canning and preserving foods, filling the shelves and bins in the cellar, were part of a summer’s day. We also played outside; life was simple as we really didn’t have a lot of material things. Games after supper in the twilight and in the dark of night were especially fun! We sat on the well top and watched the stars and listened to bird songs. Our home often had a cousin or two or some of our friends spending time with us. Grandpa lived there, too. Mom and Dad were very welcoming people and people who our childhood friends trusted. As a child, a seventh- and eighth-grader in particular, I was really mouthy. My dear Mother; she had her hands full. I loved teaching seventh- and eighth-graders some years later. I could relate only too well to their sense of “knowing it all.” Yes, mouthy is one word for who I was as a child. My siblings would also probably have called me “bossy” because I was often left in charge. I was also described by my teachers and parents as a responsible child and as a leader. The sisters often asked me to do extra chores after or before the school day and take charge of school activities. They liked me and believed in me.

Q. What is your fondest memory of being a child?

A. I would say it was Sunday afternoons. On Sunday afternoons Dad would walk the fields of the farm. I can still see him heading off. I remember trying to take big steps, walk in his steps, and follow him around. I loved it. I loved being in the fields and just walking. I don’t know that we did a lot of talking, but I loved being with him and I loved being outside. I’d often come home with a handful of wildflowers and made what I thought were just absolutely beautiful bouquets!!

Q. What gives you hope?

A. A lot of things. I mostly see the positive way over the negative or struggle in life. Right now, I see a bird in that tree. It’s spring. It’s new life. It’s hope. I see the rain. It waters the land. I know

heavy rains could cause floods but my mind doesn't go there. The land needs water. I do think hope is another word for Providence. I believe in religious life immensely. I don't worry so much of what community life will be like when I'm in my 70s and 80s and there are fewer of us. I know that can be a reality and very likely will be, but it doesn't distress me. I have hope in our unfolding future. Right now we are all so aware of our brothers and sisters in Japan and their struggles. I don't want to minimize the distresses and struggles in our everyday lives but I experience people as good and wanting to do what they can to alleviate suffering in our world. There's sure a lot of hope in that. In truth, I think my Dad, the farmer, taught me to hope and to see possibilities and alternative ways of doing things. Even when he was dying with a painful cancer, he tried hard to live with cancer, and not focus on dying with it. For him there was always reason to hope. That thinking was contagious!

Q. When do you feel most alive?

A. Probably after having meaningful conversations with people, and that's a lot. When there's laughter and/or talking about things of importance. There is energy in my step when I feel I really connected with someone. Some of the deepest connections happen when you try to be present to people and there is a mutual exchange. Sometimes the best connections happen when you know "the words" come from a deeper place inside of you and you're making a difference in each other's lives...and a part of you knows those words, in some very real sense, were not your own. Sometimes it really is in just sharing a good belly laugh that I feel most alive!

Q. Do you have any particular crafts or hobbies of interest?

A. I love to bake, and I love to bake gifts. My Mom was a great baker! I also love to do things in my home to make it more welcoming, like picking wildflowers as I did when a child. My environment is very, very important so "a craft" might simply be creating a warm home environment or rearranging furniture. I do love to read and usually have a stack of book on an end table and on the floor around my favorite chair.

Q. Do you have a baking specialty?

A. Probably an apple pie, including a homemade crust. We had a fruit orchard at home so I grew up making fruit pies. I also do a lot of muffins. Some turn out good. I try to do healthy baking without using sugar and use an assortment of fruits and whole grains. My family pretty much knows I arrive at the door with baked goods, if at all possible. It's sort of a therapy for me to bake. Sometimes I come home at night so very tired and I bake muffins or breads to rejuvenate my spirit. They may go to the office with me the next day or be put in the freezer for when company arrives.

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

A. The first thing that comes to my mind is healing, real healing in people's lives. Like right now in Japan where there is such extreme pain and suffering. Another one would be more good belly laughing, not a surface laugh, but more hearty laughter, Interesting; that brings healing, too. I

would say my third wish would be to be a grandma! My niece and a number of my nephews actually think of me as their grandmother and I love it!

Q. What would be the one thing you would like for people to remember about you?

A. It would have to be with laughter, humor, enjoying life. Laughter and a good sense of humor put so much in perspective for me. I also want people to remember me as an ordinary woman. My ordinariness is a gift, not a limitation. I'm just a very ordinary woman who enjoys life, enjoys people.

Q. When you think of God, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

A. God saying, "Have another cup of coffee!" That was something I felt God often said to me on sabbatical a few years ago as we sat together and I'd get ready to move on. The invitation was to simply spend more time in each other's presence.

Q. You really like coffee!

A. I do. I really do. But, you know it's not so much about the coffee as it is in just enjoying one another's company.

Q. What energizes you spiritually?

A. I don't know that I can make a separation. I am body, soul, spirit. I am all of that.

Q. Do you have a favorite place, or vacation destination?

A. I love Brown County (Indiana), I loved Yosemite. I *loved* Big Sur. I loved our family farm. The answer would be out, out in nature somewhere.

Q. If you were sitting down to write this story, what would be your focus?

A. It would be about God's movement, presence, energy in my life. It would be about the thousands of blessings I know. It would be great, great gratitude for parents, for simple living in my childhood, for farm life that brought us together and helped us to get through some hard times and support each other as rural communities do.

Quick responses

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

A. The sisters.

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

A. With a book, or with a book in my lap staring into space.

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

A. I enjoy going for a walk. I enjoy arranging flowers for the dining room table.

Q. I am passionate about ...

A. Almost everything, it seems.

Q. What the world needs now is ...

A. Grace.

Q. Name one thing you miss about being a kid.

A. Being barefoot and walking in the field.

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

A. It's so good to see you.

Q. What is the highlight of your week?

A. I would say visiting the hospital or meeting someone for spiritual direction.

Q. What is your least favorite chore?

A. Cleaning house.

Favorites

Flower/plant: Geranium, because it surfaces childhood memories of my Mom's love of geraniums.

Book: Speaking With Authority (Catherine of Sienna and the Voices of Women Today) by Mary Catherine Hilker.

Vacation destination: Big Sur, the Black Hills, Yosemite and Brown County, Indiana.

Recreation: Hiking, camping.

Hobby: Reading.

Sport: ☹

Animal: Prairie Dog, playing hide and seek.

Quote: “The miracle is not to walk on water, but on the Earth.” Thich Nhat Hanh

Holiday: Christmas, sitting around a softly lit tree.

Author: My brother, Linus Mundy.

Scripture passage: Psalm 139.

Dessert: Apple pie.

Time of day: Sunrise.

Season: Spring in Southern Indiana.

Childhood activity: Bonfires with family and friends on our farm.

Course in school: Homiletics.

Saint: Mother Theodore, also Catherine of Sienna

Sinner: “The woman at the well.”

Least favorite course in school: Chemistry.

My best friend says I’m ... The only person she knows who puts up Post It notes to remind people “my birthday is coming ... again...and again!”

If I weren’t an SP, I’d be ... One happy Grandma taking lots of time playing with/doing fun things with my grandchildren.”

Current ministry: Pastoral associate

Years in ministry: 47

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