

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

A. I had a very easy vocation discernment, I guess you would say. In second grade, I already had thought about being a Sister of Providence. I had them as teachers, not in first grade, but beginning in second grade and all through my education I attended Sisters of Providence schools. I was just very naturally attracted to them and to religious life. I've often thought about that as I hear of other people who have really struggled and had all kinds of things they were interested in doing, and wondering if it was just laziness on my part that I didn't look at other options, or if it was God's way of calling each of us differently. I am inclined to think it is the latter. This was in the 1950s. I grew up in a home that I would say was not overly religious in the sense that we had a lot of practices, but, certainly the Catholic faith was valued. We went to mass every Sunday. It was the era that the daily rosary was often prayed in the home. I can remember doing that, gathered around the dining room table. And, because I was going to a Catholic school (St. Patrick, Fort Wayne, Ind.), the custom then was for students, the whole school, to begin the school day by attending mass. You were seated by grades in the church. That would be pretty unusual today. Beyond that, the older girls, like seventh and eighth grade, were asked to be sacristans. We would put out the vestments and prepare the altar for mass, those kinds of things. I was chosen to do that and that left an impression on me, I'm sure. Also, at that time, the Sisters of Providence operated a high school here at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Providence Juniorate. I found out about that from my teacher and I asked my parents if I could attend high school here at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. And, when I think about it, what, 13 or 14 years old, it was probably a much greater sacrifice for my parents than it was for me. There were only two children in the family. I have an older brother. They never objected. They said, well, if it's what you want to do. My dad and mom, of course, drove me to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and every vacation and every summer, my dad would come and pick me up and take me home to Fort Wayne. So, I sort of fell into my vocation, very happily so, and I have never regretted a moment of pursuing it the way I did. Again, in this day and age, that probably would not be part of anyone's routine to leave home at that early of an age, not that we were leaving home, but, certainly, we were immersed in some of the routines of religious life because we attended all of the services in the church that the novices attended. It was kind of like a boot camp for religious life, even though we probably didn't even think it about it that way.

**Q. You mentioned that your calling to religious life came naturally, but was there a particular attraction? What made you feel that way?**

A. As a young person, I believe I was attracted more to the outward appearances, the habit, probably. I liked the way the sisters looked, the mysteriousness of it all. I liked prayer. I wouldn't say I was pious by any means. As I mentioned, attending these religious services every day like mass, and in high school (Providence Juniorate at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods) participating in everything the postulants and novices did, I never found that to be a drag. I think part of the attraction was the prayer life, the contemplative life, the quietness the sisters exuded in their being. The Sisters of Providence were certainly known best as teachers, so I'm sure that was also an attraction, but I wouldn't say a major part of it. Actually, when I entered, I tried to talk them into letting me be a cook, but they wouldn't hear of that. So, I ended up as a teacher and an administrator, and enjoyed that. I was attracted, also, to the idea that the sisters were personable, that they laughed a lot, obviously enjoyed each other. You didn't see that much of them, but when you did see them together, it was obvious there was something about their spirit. Today, we would call that community. That also was an attraction to me.

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

A. First of all, I value the variety of ministries I have had, the opportunity that each one has afforded me to affect lives in a positive way and to be affected, also, by my students, by my colleagues, staffs that I have worked with. It's certainly been much more than what I would call a job. It has definitely been a ministry in the way in which I have seen God operate in my life and in the lives of others. I've had a variety of ministries I have enjoyed. I was a teacher at grade levels from fifth on into high school. I was a secondary-school administrator. I have been in Congregation leadership, both as provincial and as general officer and I have served in various Congregation offices, such as my present ministry. But, they all have been very enriching to me as has the opportunity, as a member of the community, to be involved beyond one's ministry. I've been involved with committees too numerous to even name. There again, they have added to my own personal enrichment and brought me into contact with many other people, not just sisters, persons who have a lot to share and are professional in their own right. It has been enriching and, hopefully, I have grown from those relationships.

**Q. In your current ministry, some people might call you the chief fundraiser. How has that been for you?**

A. I've been director of the Office of Congregational Advancement for 10 years and involved with it before that. I guess I don't look on it so much as a chief fundraiser and I do chief fundraiser and relationship builder. But, certainly, that doesn't fall just to me. One of the wonderful things about being the director of the OCA is the professionals with whom I work and the ways in which each of us, and all of us, carry on the promotion of the Congregation and the mission. That's the ultimate purpose. And we do that through our development efforts, our communications, and our marketing. There are many facets to those areas. No day is ever the same, even the days you think you have planned carefully; there will be surprises that come along, sometimes even a few crises that have to be dealt with in terms of a news release or publicity. It makes for a very interesting and, sometimes profound, ministry. I certainly have grown into the position. I didn't have a clue about what one does in the development area. I really cherish the position as I have gotten to know so many of our benefactors, those who support our mission. I think the enriching part of that is the stories that I hear and the relationships that each of those benefactors have with our sisters, whether that sister is a relative, a ministry associate, a former teacher, a former administrator, someone they have met in their parish, someone they have met because they happen to worship at the same church. We never send anything out requesting funding, unless we also ask our constituents if they have any prayer intentions. It's very humbling to be on the receiving end of that, and to be asked to pray for certain family situations or issues related to health, or employment, and occasionally I even hear back from a person with a thank-you for the prayers. It always affects me, the faith of people who have requested prayers from the sisters. That's where it lies. It's the faith that prompts the request and the belief in prayer and in God and that God answers our prayers, sometimes, perhaps, not in the way we are hoping for, but there is always a strengthening of one's ability to cope with a certain situation or accept a situation. All of that is very touching.

**Q. Why would a woman today find being a Sister of Providence an attractive lifestyle, or choice to make?**

A. I think she would find herself attracted to women who are very dedicated to a mission, which we really say is God's mission for the Sisters of Providence. We try to discern what that is. We live in community, and live a life of prayer, devote ourselves to ministry. I think many young people and not-

so-young people are yearning for those elements in their lives. Overriding that, that sense of meaning or purpose in one's life that we all try to discover. Why am I here? What purpose does my life have? I think each of us answers that in a different way, whether that be single, married or religious life. First, I would have to have that call. If I do believe that God calls us to whatever state of life, then, additionally, God's hand is in a particular community that one decides to enter or particular spouse that one decides to marry. I think if we are open to God in our lives, and we Sisters of Providence would call that Providential, then the choices we make, especially as we look back on them, we would see God's action in our lives. God called me to this Congregation. I was attracted to it. I had no attraction to any other religious congregation. Somehow God gets us where God wants us. I think another aspect of the Sisters of Providence being attractive to people is that we are a very vibrant community. We enjoy being together. We are a very creative group. We are strongly committed to whatever we do. Sometimes that can be as simple as organizing a meeting. If I had to do it all over again, I would certainly do it.

**Q. How has the Congregation changed since you entered?**

A. Hmm, where does one begin? I think as I have lived religious life, the big shift for me has been in aspects of the life that were very external, be that the habit, or devotions, or teaching. The big shift in my 50-plus years that I have been a Sister of Providence is to realize that there is much, much more than the external. There is a whole internal aspect of religious life that I continue to probe, plumb the depths of. The more I read, the more I hear, writers who, certainly, have much more background in the theological or psychological insights that are offered I learn, the new ways of thinking about, not only religious life, but our universe, the cosmos, new ways of thinking about God, images of God, that I have grown to be comfortable with and would not have entered my mind 30 or 40 years ago. I'm sure the Second Vatican Council had a lot to do with that because the whole thrust of religious life after Vatican II was to get in touch with the deepest part of religious life; go back to our roots and shed some of the external practices that had become ossified, and to address the signs of the times, be more aware of the signs of the times and what the needs are in our world. That continues to compel us (propel us) (guide us) (motivate us) to this day.

**Q. Complete this sentence. Sister Ann is ...**

A. I can think of a lot of things. Sister Ann is a character, some would say, and they would be right. I would say Sister Ann is a hard worker, very loyal friend and Sister of Providence. She probably gets involved in more than she should, but she enjoys it all. She forges ahead.

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

A. A very primary role. I am an early riser and the main reason for that is because it is my best time of the day for me because I am a morning person. I know that if I don't use that early morning time for prayer, the day would slip away and I would not give it the time I want to give it. If I did not begin my day with prayer, there would be a big void, something missing. Throughout the day, there is not time, so to speak, to set aside for a period of prayer. But, there are many times during the day that I am certainly in God's presence and call upon God to help me in some way. I'm also very privileged to be here at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods where we do have daily Eucharistic Liturgy. As far as I am concerned, it is a perfectly scheduled time. Daily mass is at 11:30 a.m. and for me, it's kind of the pause that refreshes right in the middle of the work day. It's a sense of tuning back in to God, as it were, and knowing what a primary place God has in my life. I make it a priority to go to mass. I value that a great deal.

**Q. How important to you is the community lifestyle that the Sisters of Providence have?**

A. Community lifestyle can have many interpretations. Some people who refer to community mean the broader community, or the sense of the whole Congregation. We kind of use the words interchangeably sometimes. And, we are members of the Congregation. I'm fortunate because of my different positions in the community, that it required me to visit different areas where our sisters ministered and to get to know them on a more personal basis. I know some better than others, certainly, but I know every Sister of Providence. I can call her by name. I can enjoy being with her. We have meetings where many of us attend and we just sit down and start chatting with people, talking with people and it's just a great feeling. We've had a tradition in our Congregation of having our meetings yearly and we have them, primarily, here at the motherhouse. This is home. Coming home means coming back to enjoy one another and hearing one another's stories and catching up on life and ministry. That's community in the broadest sense. And then, the community in a more specific sense is the daily community that I am part of and that is living with another Sister of Providence. That means doing the normal things that one does when you have a household to take care of, coming together for prayer, for meals, cooking, cleaning, doing the household chores, mowing the lawn, all those things, which build community, build relationship with one another. In my present community situation, I live in close proximity to other Sisters of Providence, and so we have our neighborhood community and we get together for prayer on a weekly basis, for which we share the planning. And we spontaneously come together for socials, or a cookout, or somebody just wants to have a party and we gather and celebrate. Those are all forms of community to me and ways in which we come to know one another. From that, we also have one's community at work, one's parish community where we might worship. There are all different kinds of community.

**Q. Did you have any role models in your earlier years in the Congregation?**

A. Well, yes. Even before I entered the Congregation, there were a couple of my teachers that I really liked a lot. I thought they were really neat people. When I entered the Congregation, I've met different ones at schools where I was assigned. A lot of them mentored me in teaching and in administration. When I became secondary principal, I didn't have a clue as to what I should be doing. There were others on the faculty who had been principals, or seasoned high school teachers, who knew what that was all about. Up to the present moment, there are sisters whom I look up to and admire for different reasons, some for their great commitment to justice, others for their acceptance of ill health or their graceful aging, some who are closer because of friendship and have much to teach, particularly in the daily encounters of life.

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

A. Quite a bit! Being educated all of my life by Sisters of Providence, I was very familiar with Foundation Day. I knew the story, told the story and acted the story in grade school and high school. But I think it was probably our Sesquicentennial year (1990), when we read her Letters and Journals much more intentionally, we familiarized ourselves with our history in a much more intentional way. It was then that I began to appreciate the woman that she was and the traits that so endeared her and made her the strong woman that she was. She was certainly a saint, and yet she was very, very practical. As I read her journals, she had a great sense of humor, she was zealous and had a great trust in Providence. With her beatification and canonization, it just added fuel to the fire that was beginning to burn in many of us. Also, on many occasions, I have portrayed Mother Theodore with our sisters, or parish groups, or children's groups, or school or whatever. In doing that, it's always been amazing to me how people in

the audience react. It's as if Mother Theodore is really there talking to them. They say that. I don't think it's anything, particularly, that I do. I think it's that her words are so powerful and the manner in which she led her life is something that people relate to. The whole of her life: her long personal illness when she came to the United States, hardships of living at the time and what she encountered, the challenges with language, prejudice, her story just seems to find a place in people's hearts. She definitely found her way into mine.

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

A. I never imagined being anything other than a Sister of Providence. So, I would say yes. Part of being a Sister of Providence is going with the flow, being open to the actions of God in one's life. As long as I strive to do that, things seem to turn out all right. I'm not one, normally, to think a lot about the future and planning to do X, Y and Z at certain times. I have found that if you are open to Providence, things happen. Things may not have been in my wildest dreams, and yet I find myself doing them, or having the opportunity to do them.

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

A. I could be very practical. There are a lot of things that need to be done between now and the middle of June. I think the most important thing is being the kind of person people like to be around, that can be trusted, someone who tries to put forth positive energy.

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

A. Oh, I was a tomboy. I played more with boys in sports, baseball and basketball, than I did with girls, although the thing in our day was dodge ball. That was before the days of organized basketball. We didn't have Title IX, although I would have loved to have been on a high school girls' basketball team. I've always had an interest in sports. I practically lived on my bicycle. I loved to ride my bike, along or with other girls. Both of my parents worked. My father owned a dry-cleaning business. As a kid, I cleaned house before my mother got home, or I'd do the ironing, that kind of thing. It gave me a lot of pleasure to do that.

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

A. We did not have a large, extended family, but we had a couple of aunts and uncles who lived close to us. Often, we would have them over for Christmas dinner or Easter dinner or whatever. I would always enjoy that. My mom was a great cook. She would put a marvelous spread on the table without any hustle or panic or anything like that. The family gatherings were my favorite times, I think. Several of my aunts and uncles did not have children of their own, so, of course, they would spoil my brother and me, so that's probably why I remember family gatherings.

**Q. Is there anything else about your family that people might like to know?**

A. Pretty common, ordinary folk. Great card players. Being a four-member family, we played a lot of canasta, we played a lot of euchre. We played a lot of board games, especially Scrabble. We really enjoyed that type of activity. It was pretty much in the days before television, fortunately, otherwise, I'm sure we would have been in front of the TV set.

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

A. They were both people of great honesty, and generosity.

**Q. Do you have any particular philosophy about life that you could share?**

A. There is a little saying that I read years and years ago: "God is in reality." That is something that I try to remind myself of a lot. We don't find God in some dream-like state or we don't find God in the perfect person, or the perfect situation, but we do find God in whatever is real in our lives; people, places, situations, circumstances.

**Q. What gives you your most pleasure, or satisfaction?**

A. I think having good health and energy to do what I need or want to do. I have energy and health for ministry and community life. I enjoy other people. I enjoy practically everything that I do.

**Q. What gives you hope?**

A. The goodness of people. God created us in God's image, so there is goodness in each person. If each of us could act out of that goodness, I think our world would be a much different place. Unfortunately, because of violence and abuse, so many people are unloved. Ultimately, I have hope that goodness can be found.

**Q. When do you feel most alive?**

A. Four o'clock in the morning. You can ask me to do almost anything at 4 o'clock in the morning. I'll take you to the airport, I'll cook a meal, I'll sit with you, play with you, whatever. At the other end of the day, I probably would not be so accommodating.

**Q. Do you have any favorite vacation destinations?**

A. Vacation for me is any place where one can enjoy nature. I love the beauty of nature, whether it's the ocean, mountains, a lake, flower gardens or a park.

**Q. Do you have any particular crafts, hobbies, interests away from your ministries?**

A. Cooking, baking, walking, reading and Free Cell.

**Q. Any cooking specialties?**

A. I'm not a fancy-type cook. I make a good quiche, western style pork ribs, tilapia, some pretty good salads.

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

A. First, that all people be treated with dignity and respect and honored as children of God. Second, that we could zero in on the causes of cancer and Alzheimer's and somehow determine how we can stall

those illnesses and find a cure. And, third, the Sisters of Providence will be able to continue working for God for years to come.

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

A. Mystery: unfathomable, incomprehensible, yet as close and sustaining as life's breath and love's embrace.

**Q. What do you think about first when you get up in the morning?**

A. First, a cup of coffee. Then, I just pray, sit quietly, maybe read scripture. I have my routine. I like to read the morning newspaper, do some walking. I don't do a lot of strategizing or plotting.

**Q. What energizes you spiritually?**

A. Right now, I have great interest in the new cosmology and all of the ways in which our more recent discoveries are linked together. I find it all very fascinating, the interconnectedness, the interrelatedness of each thing in the Universe. It is mind-boggling. I think it all figures into one's image of God. I think the more we think we discover, the more there is to discover about our Universe and about God.

**Q. If you could wake up tomorrow with one new talent or ability, what would it be?**

A. Oh, probably to play a musical instrument or to draw, one or the other. Right now, I don't play an instrument or read music and I don't do much beyond stick figures.

**Q. But you do quite a bit of singing, especially for liturgies.**

A. I suppose I always had a voice, and my singing is related to being a cantor and singing with Schola, our choir. I never considered myself as having a particularly good voice. In the novitiate, we had the choir members and what we affectionately called Mother Theodore's choir. In Mother Theodore's choir were those who could not sing. For a few years, I was in Mother Theodore's choir. Then, all of a sudden, for some reason, I got into *the* choir. I would join in a sing-a-long, or whatever it was, then somewhere along the line, someone asked if I would ever consider cantoring. I was fortunate enough to have been offered singing lessons. I availed myself of that opportunity and learned a great deal about cantoring. I'm certainly not a professional singer, but I enjoy it immensely. I'm just happy to be able to do it. It's a great privilege.

**Quick connections**

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

A. The natural beauty.

**Q. When I'm not officially at work or involved in ministry, you are mostly likely to see me ...**

A. Reading, watching TV sports, walking.

**Q. On weekends, I like to ...**

A. Keep my sanity by going to the office (laughing). I try to keep Sunday as my real Sabbath. It doesn't always work, but I try to.

**Q. I am passionate about ...**

A. Non-violence.

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

A. Respect and kindness.

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

A. I recently had the opportunity to select a gift from a catalog for my 25 years in ministry. I saw a dartboard. I said that's what I wanted.

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

A. Being able to run.

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

A. Well done, good and faithful servant.

**Q. Have you ever met anyone famous?**

A. Nancy O'Connor, (actor) Carroll O'Connor's wife

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

A. Filing, making order out of files.

## **Favorites**

Website: [www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com).

Flower/plant: Pansy.

Recreation: Walking.

Hobby: Walking, watching sports on TV.

Sport: Football, basketball and baseball.

Quote: God is in reality.

Holiday: Thanksgiving.

Scripture passage: Is. 42: 1-4

Dessert: Warm bread pudding.

Time of day: Early morning.

Season: Spring.

Comic strip: Zits.

Childhood activity: Playing board games/cards.

Hero/heroine: Saint Mother Theodore Guerin.

Saint: Mother Theodore Guerin.

Least favorite food: Cooked turnips.

Least favorite course in school: Math.

My best friend says I'm ... Too fussy and detail oriented.

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

Current ministry: Executive director, Office of Congregational Advancement

Years in ministry: 53

Contact information: [acasper@spsmw.org](mailto:acasper@spsmw.org) or 812-535-2801.