

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

A. When I was in high school, I met the Sisters of Providence for the first time. My homeroom teacher at that time was Sister Deidre Clements (RIP). Among the Sisters of Providence I had met at that time, she was the one who touched me the most because she was real. Other sisters I had experienced before that were a little standoffish. But Sister Deidre was real. She treated us in her class, each one of us, with a great love and a great respect. I thought then, "That's what I want." Not only did I meet her in high school, I would take my younger sisters over to meet her. She would play with us. I also lived with her in Loogootee (Indiana). I was teaching first grade and she was teaching high school. She had a great love for people and a great love for animals. She loved cats.

Q. You talked about Sister Deidre being "real." Can you elaborate a little on that?

A. I was taught by a different congregation in grammar school. They always seemed to me to be a little bit standoffish. They were pleasant enough in the classroom, but they didn't seem like one of us. Sister Deidre WAS like one of us. She treated us like she would treat her children, her nieces and nephews. She didn't have that "air" about her. She was just very real, down to Earth, common.

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

A. I think it has been bringing the Gospel to the point of peoples' needs where they are, not where I want them to be. One of my ministries was being a catechist, sharing the word of God and faithful mission with others. It was very important for me to take the teachings of the Church out of theoretical language and put them into common-sense language that people could understand. They could come to know the God that was within them, not just in a textbook.

Q. How do you do that?

A. I believe it's how you treat one another. It's spending time with them. It's walking next to them. It's being with them in their happy times as well as being with them in their sad times. It's showing them that God loves them no matter who they are or what they do. Unconditional love is hard to grasp, but it is essential. I believe that is what God calls each one of us to do. And, that's what Providence invites us to do, to be with people where they are so they can discover better that God is in them so they can share with other people.

Q. Can you share some of your experiences about your earlier ministries.

A. I started out as a teacher in primary grades. I spent one year at St. Thomas Aquinas in Indianapolis. I was seven years at Loogootee (Indiana). It was a public-parochial school. During the last year I was there, I was teaching religion. I also was the coordinator of the religious education program. Then, I was a hospital chaplain for two years. I went into clinical pastoral education and completed my master's degree in education and religious studies. I was debating if I was going to go on and supervise in CPE or get into catechetics, which was really my love, my passion. I was director of religious education in the Archdiocese of Chicago for 14 years, in two different parishes. I went to the Diocese of Joliet (Illinois)

and ministered in the religious education office for the diocese as a leadership formation consultant. I was there for five years. When I left that position, I went to Kankakee (Illinois) and was the director of the Lisieux Pastoral Outreach Center and at the same time I was also invited by a publishing company to write books on the sacraments for children. The company is now called Our Sunday Visitor Curriculum Division. I have been a regional/national consultant with that company and I give workshops across the United States on various topics related to catechesis, faith formation and sacraments.

Q. What have you learned from your ministry experiences?

A. I learned that there is a great hunger to know God. There is a great desire to make God real in our lives. Too often in the Church, we have used theoretical language, language that is so difficult. You have to make it real for people. My experience in hospital ministry is that people definitely need others to walk with them, to pray with them. So much healing takes place inside. When we are healed from the inside, then we can be healed from the outside. My ministry here, as a general officer, is to be present with the sisters, to be aware of the Congregation as a whole, and how we see God's Providence, and how we are with each other living out the traditions give to us by Mother Theodore. It's also how we are with our publics. It's a different type of spreading God's word. It's seeing it through a different lens.

Q. Some people really struggle with the theoretical concept of Church teachings.

A. I think too often we put our teachings in such a language that it makes no sense. I believe we have to have it make sense. It's not about how much we memorize. It's much more about what's in our heart. My doctoral thesis "GOD-SPEAK: A Process of Theological Reflection for Young Children" is about children and how they experience and communicate with God. In my studies, I found out that children have an innate ability to communicate with God. The problem is not with the children. What has happened in the church is that we have never really listened to the children. As we grow into adults, we think we have to do what the book says, rather than what God says to us in our hearts. We take all the book answers rather than looking rather than looking at the answers in our hearts. That's what I try to do with people when I walk with them. I try to encourage them to listen to the answers in their hearts because God is there. What I have found is that, yes, the traditional prayers of the church are important, but, it is much more important that we can pray from within our hearts. Sometimes that prayer has no words. It is simply a feeling. I think we have been so worried about what the book says that we have not listened to God within our hearts. As I have traveled across the country, so many people want to make sure that children have the answers. But if you ever ask adults, they might be able to recite the Baltimore Catechism. But, if you ask children today, it's not about the answers they have memorized, it's about how they see God in their lives and in their relations with their families and other people in school. If all of us could understand that a little bit better, yes, the books are important, the teachings of the traditional messages are important, but we have to come to realize how God is acting in our own lives, right here, right now. And it's not always what's written in a book. Because we were baptized, we belong to God. So we have to learn how to express that. That song about the 12 days of Christmas, it's all about how God is present to us. The stained-glass windows in our churches tell the history of the church. Most of us today never take the time, really, to look at those stained-glass windows. We don't understand that they are a teaching tool. We have so much information in them.

Q. Why would a woman find religious life today an attractive life choice?

A. I believe that God continues to call women today, and, yes, it is a challenge, but it also is saying yes to that deepest part of God inviting you to live out your baptismal promises, that it's about how we share

God's love and God's life with others, and that is what religious life is about. How do we do that today? How do we do that with others in community? It's about sharing that common journey and sharing the word of God with one another, and within our ministries.

Q. Have you ever had a defining moment as a Sister of Providence or in your life?

A. Yes, I've had several. Probably the most significant for me happened in September of 1969. I was in a terrible automobile accident. I remember after I woke up, my dad said to me, "The doctors don't know why you are alive, but God must want something from you. It was after the accident that I really struggled with faith and what the church teaches. I said, "Hey, I'm alive. So what difference does it make if I go to community prayer or if I go to Mass. I stopped doing all of that. I was on playground duty one day and a little girl in my class came up to me and said, "Hey, Sister, how come you don't go to church no more?" I said, "Well, I could either go on Saturday night or Sunday." She said, "Unh, uh. My mommy and my daddy and my brothers and my sisters ever see you there." In an instant, I allowed a child to touch my life. I think it was because of that, that I began to really look at how children come to know and experience God. The challenge of a child! God loved me, I was still alive, so what difference does all this stuff make? What difference does it make if you pray, or you don't pray? It was part of my spiritual conversion.

Q. Please complete this sentence. Sister Jane Marie is ...

A. Alive and real.

Q. What role does prayer have in your life?

A. It's essential. If I did not take the time every day to be in touch with God in my life by reading the scriptures, by praying with them, by simply being quiet, I can't hear God speak to me. There is so much of me there, I can't hear God. So, how can I do God's work? So, prayer is essential for me. The Eucharist is just a root. Participating in the Eucharist gives me the strength that I need. It's through the prayer, the Eucharist, the sacrament that I am who I am today.

Q. How important is the community lifestyle that is available to you?

A. I think it's really important because it's how we share with one another who we are and how we are. God speaks to each one of us. We take time to be with each other. So often we do things with one another, but it's more important to be with one another.

Q. Do you have any SP role models?

A. Yes, Sister Deidre Clements for sure. There have been many others. Sister Joseph Eleanor was the principal of the Aspirancy when I went there for two years of high school. Mother Mary Pius, also.

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

A. She has a great influence. Several years ago, I gave a workshop in the Diocese of Evansville. I was sharing about Mother Theodore, and, afterward, the teacher/catechist came up to me and said, "Did you really know her when she was alive? You talk about her like she was your best friend." I said, "No, I

never met her personally, but after coming to community and reading her Journals and Letters, she is alive to me.”

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

A. I never thought about what it would be like. I just try to take one day at a time. No, I never imagined I would be here doing what I am doing today. But, I believe it is Providence in my life that has led me to where I am today. I couldn't be where I am if I had not been where I had been before.

Q. Had you ever thought about a different career before you became a Sister of Providence?

A. I wanted to be a priest, but knew I couldn't because I was a girl, not a boy. I had thought about becoming a sister when I was young. I have a second cousin who is a Precious Blood sister. It was really when I met Sister Deidre and the Sisters of Providence as a whole when I would go work at the convent.

Q. So, what actually called you to be a Sister of Providence?

A. It was certainly after I received my First Communion. My family is German Catholic and we would go to church all the time. We would say the Sorrowful Mother novena every Friday. I remember being in the church, I don't remember the occasion, but I remember sitting there and talking to God and remember hearing this voice, "Come and follow me." I thought about what that might mean. I remember the sisters I had in school saying that God invites us to him. At that time, I didn't think much of it, but I thought, "OK, I'll follow." The more I know about children now, it was probably an innate ability that I had at that time that God was calling me and I couldn't put it into words.

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

A. Prayer. Relationships. Community. Prayer has to be the root and foundation of who I am. Relationships are how I come to experience God's presence in other people. Community is, indeed, how we reflect Providence in one another and to the world.

Q. What were you like as a child?

A. My father was a retired lieutenant colonel. He was a military man. We had to follow the rules to the letter. Part of me was very obedient. The other part of me was very rebellious. I would see how much I could get away with. I am the oldest in my family. I was born during the second World War. My dad was a prisoner of war at the time I was born. I did even see him until I was about a year and a half old. I have six younger sisters. I grew up with my mom's family with my dad being in the war. My mom is the third oldest of 12. Some of her younger sisters are only about five years older than I am.

Q. What is your fondest childhood memory?

A. Being out on the farm with my grandparents in Ohio, my mom's family. Just working with them out on the farm, riding horses with my uncle, my mom's youngest brother. I would ride one horse and he would ride another. He would eventually become the rodeo champion for the state of Ohio. I would do all of these different rides with him. That, and working with the chickens, the cows and pigs., just being out on the farm.

Q. Of all the things you learned from your parents, what do you consider to be the most valuable?

A. Probably what I learned from my mom is treat everyone as yourself. When we lived in Fort Wayne, a man was delivering coal to my house. I said to my mom, "The chocolate man is coming." She said, "His name is Mr. Jones. He has a wife and children like you. Don't you ever call him that again."

Q. What world event has had the most impact on you?

A. Most recently, the incident in Tucson and the 9/11 tragedy and the impact that they had on all of us. Before that, it would have been President Kennedy's death. I think with 9/11 you see how the people of the world are out to get one another rather than love one another. And, with John Kennedy, he tried to bring God's love into politics and he was shot and killed for it.

Q. Do you have a particular philosophy about life that you would like to share?

A. I've never thought much about it. Basically, it's just that God created each one of us and God loves us just the way we are. We need to treat other people with respect.

Q. What gives you your most pleasure or satisfaction?

A. Seeing people happy, enjoying God's presence in creation, enjoying the sunrise and sunset, looking out and seeing the moon, and just being with people, being with my friends and family. It's God's reflection for me.

Q. What gives you hope?

A. What gives me hope is that the sun rises every morning and God is present with us. Every day is a gift. I see it especially in children, infants, flowers and each person. God's life is constantly growing. It is constantly blooming.

Q. When do you feel most alive, or energetic?

A. When I am able to share God's love and the story about how God is with people. I was just thinking about this past summer when I was on vacation in the Canadian Rockies with friends. Just seeing God's hand in that was spectacular.

Q. Do you have a favorite vacation spot?

A. Yes, it would be Canada, besides the farm. In many ways, Canada is an area that is still pristine. Just to see God's beauty so alive. It has not been neglected; it's been respected. I've been to different parts of Canada and it speaks to me of the grandeur of God.

Q. Any particular crafts, hobbies or special interests?

A. I love photography. I love to sew and to cook? I like to make my mom's bread. I haven't done that in a while. It takes time. I love to garden, just being with the Earth.

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

A. The first is that there would be peace, second is that we all learn to love one another unconditionally and third that everyone might be able to walk with God.

Q. What would you most like for people to remember about you?

A. That I loved them and cared about them.

Q. What would you do if you didn't have to work?

A. Volunteer. I would probably continue to do what I do. If I could do whatever I wanted, I would continue to be involved.

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

A. The image of a baker woman. Several years ago, someone gave me a picture of a baker woman and it was somewhat like my maternal grandmother. She was the one from whom I really learned a lot about God. I remember when she was baking bread, how she made it and how we talked about it and how she taught me about God. So when I think about different religions and about God, that image comes to mind.

Q. What is the first thing you think about when you get up in the morning?

A. I thank God that I am alive and I pray that I can give the very best that I have to each person and each circumstance that I have that day.

Q. What energizes you spiritually?

A. I believe that it is the Gospel and the Scriptures as well as prayer, and I reflect on books that have been part of my life for years, and just taking each day as it is, as a gift. Also, being present with God, being present with Mother Theodore and being present with our Constitutions.

Q. What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?

A. I think my greatest achievement is being present with people. And then being the first in my family to graduate, get a doctorate degree, have some articles and sacrament books published.

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

A. Thanks for a life lived well.

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

A. My focus would be not on me personally, but how I am able to give of myself to be in service to others.

Quick thoughts

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

A. The peace, the serenity, the beauty.

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

A. Being with people, or walking.

Q. On weekends, I love to ...

A. Relax, get caught up on all of the things I haven't been able to do.

Q. I am passionate about ...

A. Life, and God.

Q. What the world needs now ...

A. Peace, and hope.

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

A. Having the freedom to do what I want, when I want.

Q. What is your biggest pet peeve?

A. People who think they are right and don't listen to anyone else.

Q. What is the highlight of your week?

A. Usually, Sunday Eucharist.

Q. What is your least favorite chore?

A. Probably dusting, even though I do it.

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

A. Saint Mother Theodore, my mom, and my maternal grandmother.

Favorites

Food: Fresh homemade baked bread, hot out of the oven (my mom's, or her mom's).

Flower or plant: Pink and white, or red and white, poinsettia.

Book: The Bible.

Movie: The Sound of Music.

TV show: What Would You Do?

Vacation spot: Canada.

Hobby: Photography.

Sport: Baseball.

Music/song: Classical.

Pizza topping: Pineapple, ham, mushrooms and cheese.

Quote: "Lean with all of your weight on Providence and you will find yourself well supported. – Saint Mother Theodore Guerin.

Holiday: Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Scripture passage: Micah 6:8 This is what Yahweh asks of you ,only this: to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.

Dessert: Blueberry pie or any kind of pie.

Time of day: Sunrise and sunset.

Season: Autumn.

Comic strip: The Family Circus.

Childhood activity: Spending time on the farm with my grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Saint: Mother Theodore Guerin.

Sinner: Me.

Least favorite food: Anything spicy.

Least favorite course in school: Math.

My best friend says I am ... full of energy and don't know how to slow down.

If I weren't an SP, I'd be ... a mom with a large family living on a farm.

Other

Current ministry: General officer,

Years in Congregation: 49

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