

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

A. That goes into my call story. I am a Catholic convert. I was not Catholic when I felt the call. I was on a spiritual journey, but I did not participate in institutional church at that point. During that part of the process, I was journaling, living my own life, working and had my own place. In my journaling, I was asking questions and having some conversations with God. In those conversations, it was suggested to me that I might want to consider being a nun, which shocked me. I didn't know what that meant. It was not my life experience. I had not been around nuns. I didn't do anything with that for a while, but it didn't go away. Eventually I contacted a family friend, Eileen, who had been a Sister of Saint Joseph. She had left that community many years previously. She was the only person I knew who had any experience in that life. I met with her. Her words of advice to me were, "You need to look at the Catholic faith first, the RCIA program, and you need to go very slowly." So she suggested that I go through the RCIA program and, if I still felt the need to pursue it, I could get in touch with her again. She said she had a good friend who was a sister in a community that she thought was a wonderful community. So, I did go through RCIA and I was confirmed in April 2000. In November 2000, I went to my first Discernment Weekend (at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods). Prior to that, after I was confirmed, I still had this urging. I thought maybe converting to Catholicism and going to Mass would be enough. But I still had this prompting. I contacted Eileen again and went to Mass with her, and I met Sister Marilyn Herber (SP) after Mass that day. Then, I met with Sister Marilyn a couple of times. Sister Marilyn called me one day when I was at work and she said, "I just received the Vocation Discernment Weekend brochure and it's in November. I know it's short notice, but I think it would really be helpful to you. Do you think you could go?" I ended up going. I had never been to Terre Haute. So I decided if I made it there, it was meant to be and if not, it wasn't. I did make it, with next to no difficulty, to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. I didn't offer a lot (during the Discernment Weekend). I was there for input. I was very surprised. I didn't know if I would come and find people in habits. I just had no idea. Sister Paula Damiano was the vocation director. At the end of that weekend, she and I spoke for about three hours. At the end of that discussion, we concluded that I was ready for a discernment guide. She had someone in mind, but she needed to contact that person. Sister Sue Buthod was very open to being my discernment guide. She lived 10 minutes from me. I started meeting with her monthly in Indianapolis. The formal part of the discernment process had 14 study/reflection units. I went through those with Sister Sue, and we continued to meet for a total of two and a half years. In conversation with Sister Jenny Howard, who had become the vocation director shortly after I started the vocation process, it was agreed I was ready to apply if I was so inclined, which I was. I was accepted and entered in 2003 - and here I am. I believe my becoming a Sister of Providence was a combination of the "call", the connection to this place, the connection to the energy (charism) of this community, and reading about Mother Theodore. One of my deepest passions is women's issues. I see that in Mother Theodore in her time, in her life, so that really calls to me, along with the needs of our time around women's issues and how to respond to those needs.

Q. You had no history, no contact, no nothing with the Catholic faith, yet you heard this call?

A. It was very shocking to me. I really resisted this call. It was a "Jeremiah" kind of response. I laughed out loud when I heard this "nun" in my head. I thought and said, "You've got to be kidding. I don't even know what that means. I don't know what it means to be a nun. I'm not Catholic" – giving a litany of reasons why God must have the wrong person. I was trying to ignore it, but it wouldn't go away. It didn't

come from me. I had no reference for it. I had to pay attention to it. It became a choice. Do I continue to try to ignore it or do I open myself up to the possibility? I started reaching out. I reached out to my Mom and talked with her. I reached out to Eileen and took her advice. I moved slowly. I took plenty of time in my discernment process. I went at my own pace in discernment, not just with myself, but with God and others. The initial formation process allows for that. It's built around discernment that allows time and supports personal growth.

Q. What were you searching for while you were on your spiritual journey?

A. I think it was the questions. I was working, but I didn't really enjoy what I was doing. I was a licensed insurance agent. I did inside service and I would do some sales if there were calls for that. I made decent money. I did pretty much what I wanted to do. I could have what I wanted to have. It wasn't fulfilling, but I had my own place, I could pay my bills and I could live comfortably. But it felt like something was missing. I had been journaling for some time, and I had been journaling that day, and I was asking these questions: what's the meaning? What's the purpose of this life I've been given? What's my purpose? I continue to be on a spiritual journey and expect to be on this journey for the rest of this life.

Q. Can you elaborate on your thoughts and feelings when the call came to you?

A. I was sitting in my apartment, journaling, looking out the screened-in porch at the little lake with a fountain. I had the porch door open. I enjoy the sound of water, the sight of water, the rhythm of water. I asked the questions: What is the meaning of all this? What's the purpose for me being here? What's the purpose of this life? I was quiet. In my head, I heard "nun." That's it. "Nun!" Immediately, even without that background, I thought N-U-N, rather than N-O-N-E. For me it was God energy. I don't envision God as a being, but more as God energy within and through everything. In that experience, and in looking back over my life experience, I find it interesting that it seems like where the spirit is moving me is not usually rational. It's not usually something I would think of or come to on my own. But in my journey, that seems to be where I find the movement of God, usually not in human reason. That's how the spirit moves for me, but we are all unique. The spirit moves through all of us in its own way. I was welcomed here when I came. I felt comfortable coming. I was very surprised during that first discernment weekend with the personalities and self-expression. With my lack of experience, I was expecting a lot of calm, quiet, not a lot of animation. I thought, "I'm not wearing a habit. If they're wearing habits, I can't do it. It won't be a fit for me." If they were expected to all be the same way, it wouldn't fit very well. It was good for me that they were in contemporary dress, they had different personalities and expressed them, and there was laughter.

Q. What do you value most about the ministry opportunities that you have had with the Sisters of Providence?

A. My ministry experiences are one of the main things that have helped to expand my world view and my life experience. In Beech Grove (Indiana), I was insulated. In my formation process, I relocated to Palos Heights, Illinois, for my postulant year. That year is for getting to know more about living as a Sister of Providence. I had a lot of long- and short-term ministries with various sisters to get to know them and their various ministries. It was a very important time. I met and interacted with many people whose life experiences were very different from mine. That's just part of growing, to see how others live their lives, what is the essence of life, their spiritual support, how do they sustain themselves? Most of the people who are ministered to have very difficult lives. I was amazed at their inner strength and their

faith. I've learned a lot from all of the encounters I've been blessed to have throughout all of my ministry experiences. I've been changed by these encounters.

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

A. Women today have so many more opportunities than they used to have. But, women today, in general, in most cultures, are not considered equal. I can only speak from my own experience and what brought me here. With my passion and energy, how did I feel called to focus it? I felt called to focus where I could be with a community of women that I would support and believe I would be supported and to be accountable to one another. I wanted to be supported in ministry where I could make a difference. It comes down to, for me, how am I going to use my passion, my life energy? How am I being called to use that? What's attracting me? For me, it was religious life. It's a very challenging time in the institutional church. But, where my passions are, I cannot imagine doing it on my own. Community is very important. I am challenged by the members of our Congregation and, in turn, I challenge members of our Congregation. We call our gifts forward. We take risks. Rather than having a family and children, my energies are directed in a different way. The call is something I could not ignore. Anyone who has experienced that would know what I am talking about. If you have an experience, an urging or a call, my advice would be not to ignore it. It's a leap of faith, at least it was for me. But, I can't imagine not being where I am now. I have changed and grown a lot from who I was. I feel there is a freedom in being part of a women's religious community, to have that communal support, both given and received. I am ministering at St. Ann Clinic in Terre Haute. I would not be able to do that on my own. It's a gift to be there and work with people from 13 counties who don't have health insurance. There is a huge need and it's a chance to get to know people on an individual level.

Q. Can you share some thoughts about the discernment process?

A. With regard to vocation and discernment, I have been involved in discernment weekends since I entered. That's part of the formation process. I've also been involved at a host site for the Indianapolis "Nun Run." In both of those settings, something that was said by the women who were discerning was, "How did you know? How did you know 100 percent that this was the right choice? My response to that was: there is no guarantee. I didn't have that. Making the choice to enter is to say I am going to move toward this. It is still a discernment *process*. It is a chance to explore a possibility, and in making that choice, remembering it's not the last or only choice, because the discernment *process* continues.

Q. Let's talk a little about your ministry? What is your role?

A. I do pretty much whatever is needed. We all do just about everything. I interview potential volunteers, give them a tour, and talk with them about their volunteer time. We receive a lot of donations and I work with those, but I'm not the only person who does that. We're in the process of converting to electronic medical records. I'm the main contact for that process. I focus on those three areas, but I also fill in for a volunteer who isn't able to come. I am the person who will "fill the gap." Trying to plan my day is hard because I just don't know what will happen as a day unfolds. However, no day is the same so it keeps the ministry interesting and life-giving. Many of my daily encounters are surprising and unique.

Q. What do you see there? What do you feel there?

A. I feel very blessed to be a part of the clinic and the ministry there. We have a very small staff. We would not be able to function without the volunteers we have. It can be very stressful, especially on Tuesdays and Wednesdays when we have open clinic. I feel angry because of the systemic injustice in our society. I see human beings who should be able to have regular, local health care. In my opinion, health care is not a privilege, it is a right. Several of our patients have said if it were not for the clinic, they would be dead. We have people come in who have never been without work until now. They were able to pay their bills, keep food on the table and a roof over their heads. We have people who work full time, but don't make a living wage - and "full time" includes more and more people who work 2-3 part-time jobs so they are ineligible for benefits.

Q. Can you talk more about the people who visit the clinic? Some are there for bad colds, others have a terminal illness, right?

A. We go from flu season, colds, breathing issues, to patients who have been diagnosed with cancer. A lot of our patients have chronic conditions. We have several specialty clinics, our largest being for persons with diabetes. The clinic has good community support. We are able to reach out to providers in the community for our patients who have a special need. We try to get that special need met. We have two days of open clinic (when the volunteer providers see patients), and specialty clinics are ongoing throughout the week. I'd estimate we have 150 to 200 patients a week. A lot of people come in for their medicines. Between the providers and the medicinal needs, it's a multi-million-dollar service for the community. All of it is covered by donations and grants.

Q. What kind of impact does it have on you?

A. It brings front and center the impact of systems that don't work. Systems are necessary, but systems are supposed to serve people and not the other way around.

Q. Where do you find God energy?

A. I just had a book discussion group as part of my Tertian year. The book we read was [A Presence That Disturbs](#) by Anthony Gittens. A Victor Frankel quote in that book said, "To live you must choose, to love you must encounter, to grow you must suffer." I find God Energy in the choosing, in the encountering, and in the suffering/struggling. In the ministry it is the encounter, which, to me, brings to the center love and compassion.

Q. Please complete this sentence. Sister Beth is ...

A. A woman who is continuing to grow into her own skin.

Q. What role does prayer have in your life?

A. It is essential. Prayer is very broad. Prayer is where you touch the God energy. I can pray when I am going to the clinic. I can pray when I walk outside. I pray when I have a conversation. I would say the way I define prayer is that it's like breathing. Both are necessary for life. Prayer, for me, is directed, intentional encounter with God energy.

Q. How important to you is the opportunity to live in community?

A. It's central. I have lived in Owens Hall (Saint Mary-of-the-Woods) in a larger local community. I have lived in a house of five. I have lived in a house of three. I've lived in a house of two. All were very different experiences. All were very important experiences. To live in community has impact. It invites personal growth. There are different personalities, different ways of life. It calls you to respect and love one another, even if you don't agree with one another. It calls a person to really listen attentively. Another perspective is very important. There are mutual responsibilities in the community, and there is mutual accountability.

Q. How much influence does Saint Mother Theodore Guerin have in your life? How do you live out her legacy today?

A. That is part of where we are at as a community right now, carrying on the legacy of Mother Theodore and her five companions, and adding our own contributions in these times. I feel like her legacy invites us to be disturbers. To me, she was a disturber. She did not remain in boxes. In her time, she was a business woman, she was a pharmacist, and she was a collaborative leader. She had extreme difficulty and challenges throughout her life, and she maintained respect, love and compassion. She also remained true to herself, true to the Spirit within her. She was very much in support of a woman being at least equal in the world.

Q. You are now in your Tertian year, a time when you are in preparation for perpetual vows. What does it mean to you to have come this far on your journey?

A. I have just started my ninth year in community. It is a process and it takes time. It is a life choice. It's a time for moving from temporary (professed) to perpetual. A year of preparation is a gift. With my coordinator and my mentor, the three of us planned for the year. There were certain elements that needed to be included, so I was very involved in what this year would look like. I've had two of my three discussion groups. Both have been just wonderful experiences. Again, it's a chance to really listen, to hear other people's thoughts, feelings and opinions. I have a 30-day retreat planned and that's the centerpiece of the year. I know July 1, 2012 is coming, but I'm not there yet. I have my full-time ministry, I have other commitments within and outside community, and I have the Tertian process. I am trying to stay in the moment.

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

A. My spirituality has grown to the point that I believe we are *all* in God and of God, and we need to treat each other that way.

Q. What gives you hope?

A. The daily encounters in my ministry, the conversations we have in community, our Providence Associate Relationship – the Occupy Wall Street movement gives me hope!

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

A. That I had an openness to life, to people, to possibilities .

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

A. Possibilities!

Q. What energizes you spiritually?

A. Encounters with people and nature; WomenChurch

Quick thoughts

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

A. The spirit here. The feel of the place. The peacefulness.

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

A. Reading, playing games, relaxing, visiting with family, friends, and SPs.

Q. I am passionate about ...

A. Women's issues.

Q. What the world needs now ...

A. Is loving and compassionate encounters among people and within creation.

Q. What is the highlight of your week?

A. Knowing or feeling that whatever needs that were present were met somehow, someway.

Q. What is your least favorite chore?

A. Just one? If I had to pick one it would be dusting.

Favorites

Website: Libraries, Amazon.

Food: Unfortunately, too many to count.

Flower/plant: Tulip.

Book: I love to read. Too many “favorites” to count.

TV show: I rarely watch television.

Vacation spot: Hawaii, but there are lots and lots of places I’ve never been, so who knows?

Recreation: Playing cards, board games, tossing a Frisbee.

Hobby: Reading, hanging out with family and friends.

Sport: To watch, football. To *try* to play, tennis or kickball.

Music/song: Right now, anything by Daughtry.

Animal: Wolf.

Pizza topping: Veggies; onion, mushroom, green pepper.

Holiday: Thanksgiving.

Author: Sue Monk Kidd, Michael Morwood, Joan Chittister, Iris Johansen, Catherine Coulter, Harlan Coben, David Baldacci – to name a few!

Dessert: White cake with buttercream icing.

Time of day: Late evening.

Comic strip: Garfield.

Childhood activity: Playing kickball on the court where we lived.

Hero/heroine: My mom.

Course in school: Psychology-type course, human behavior/development courses.

Saint: Mother Theodore Guerin.

My least favorite food: Olives, all kinds.

Least favorite course in school: Chemistry, Statistics.

My best friend says ... I’m thoughtful, wise and have an “old soul.”

If I weren’t an SP, I’d still be ... working with women in high-risk situations, empowering women.

Other

Years in ministry: 9

Current ministry: Assistant administrator, St. Ann Clinic

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