



interchange

Reflecting on the Spirit

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Dear Friends,

The Sisters of Saint Francis are a marvelous combination of spirit-filled personalities, each offering different perspectives, and each sharing their gifts so freely.

Sister Therese Jilk has shared her gift of writing by continuing to meet with the Sisters residing at Assisi Heights, offering a glimpse into their past ministries, and sharing their current lives. Sister Therese conducted the following interviews over the last several months. We hope you enjoy these reflections!

Kathy Gatliff

Director, Communications & PR

Spirited Until the End

Sister Baptiste Fish

On November 26, 2018, Sister Therese Jilk interviewed Sister Baptiste Fish for this upcoming issue of Interchange. Who would have guessed that this lively spirit would go home to God only six months later?

The spirit of **Sister Baptiste's** ministry in late November 2018, was praying for others. Case in point: when I arrived at her doorway, unannounced, Baptiste was praying the rosary. She quickly assured me she would do a restart when we were finished, "because I consider this interview as prayer, too!" At the heart of her own continuing intellectual growth is keeping actively engaged, which includes playing computer games daily.



Baptiste was engaged in ministry as a business administrator for nonprofit organizations. An opportunity was presented to her in Arizona, when there were no jobs with this focus in our own local institutions. Another factor, was that she needed to be living close enough to her parents, who lived in Arizona, as they now required more than their mutual care-giving had been previously. Baptiste was most grateful to our Franciscan Congregation for graciously providing a car for her use, and the freedom to assist her parents. In due time, her parents died, and Sister Louise Romero called her to invite her to come to Santa Ana, California, "back into community." Another wonderful gift!

Even in broad strokes, the above account opens up Baptiste's gifts: hospitality, the ability to communicate, and beneath it all, and holding it all together, the gift of FAITH. This lady, in her 90s, realized that the best piece of advice she was offered, is "be yourself!" The

ease with which Baptiste shared her story is generous proof of doing just that--a living example.

In spite of it all, she endured constant pain in her right hip and leg. Stemming from a childhood stray from "family rules," Baptiste slipped and landed on glass on her way down a hill, causing infection in her hip, which became a permanent limitation. Without antibiotics in her childhood years, that fall resulted in lasting damage.

Baptiste is an avid reader and "loves all books." In fact, she read a book a day as a school child during the two years of bedridden medical treatment for the hip infection. Consequently, she was able to return to her regular grade at school. Being so well-read, she had caught up with her peers.

I suspect that in all the highways and byways of childhood and teenage years, Baptiste learned a few masterful tricks and schemes. She brought some of them along on entering the convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis. She tells the story of going in on her knees to her postulant director, handing over a partially used pack of Winston cigarettes, (which she had brought along just in case becoming a non-smoker proved too much for her) asking for a penance. Instead she was told, "You'll go into shock if you quit all at once." (At that time it was thought that quitting "cold turkey" would cause seizures.) But Baptiste had already stopped smoking before she entered the convent... and she had not experienced any seizures either. In fact, she put out her last cigarette as she walked in the door of the Rochester Franciscans!

Here at Assisi Heights, on 3rd Francis, Baptiste lauds the "super health care she receives, and the attention of her caregivers." Just as we were finishing our visit, a nurse aid came with the special lift machine to allow her to "change position" in her wheelchair. All this seemed so normal for her, that it was hard to believe the obvious limits of her body. For sure, it points to an admirable self-forgetfulness, born of gratitude for all that is... or isn't.

Baptiste summed up the present work/ministry of Rochester Franciscans as praising God and bringing God's blessings to others. That rings true to me, Baptiste, because the tone of your spirit is genuinely perfect pitch.



In memory of Sister Baptiste Fish - January 25, 1928 - May 30, 2019

Melding Experiences Deepens the Spirit

Sister June Kaiser



We were probably about half way through our time together, when **Sister June Kaiser** offered a spontaneous statement, which I think is at the heart of her life: "All my life," she said, "I've had this sort of gift: I never looked back on where I came from, or the ministry I had been doing." Putting it a bit differently, she explained, it was like each ministry just grew into the next assignment, or each one melded into the next.

At 92 years of age, this wise woman, now living at Assisi Heights since 2017, is aware of the breadth and height of her many years of ministry in many places and forms: Teacher, Principal, Associate Director, Novice Director, Campus Minister, Registrar, Congregational Treasurer, and finally, Retired Caretaker at Gaelic Grove, to name only some of her missions. In that ministry of care-taking for the last 30 years, until 2017, June recalls getting to know many Sisters in a different way... in the relaxed atmosphere of Gaelic Grove. It was a mutual blessing, for sure.

In each of her ministries, there were both rewards and challenges, but her time at the College of Saint Teresa (CST) was of significant prominence. "It was a changing factor in my life, giving a direction." Being a student there, connecting with her teachers, and with Franciscan Sisters in Community, the "very atmosphere of CST" greatly influenced her, and drew her into personal adulthood, which would never be the same. It probably was also where the vocational seed was planted to join the Sisters of Saint Francis. All of the melding influenced her deepening spirit, and yet, June's life at Assisi Heights still keeps

unfolding. It builds onto what began 92 years ago, in Columbus, Ohio, where she grew up with two brothers and one sister, in a family whose favorite sport was golf.

"Coming to Assisi Heights a little over a year ago has been like coming home," she says. "Renewing the strength of the past and being open to the vision of the future, including the ever beckoning path into eternity."

Thanks, dear June, for all you have been and continue to be in our Franciscan Family! The final "merging" of the past and this present is probably in the waiting-to-be-opened boxes of your arrival, and re-reading parts of your favorite book, St. Teresa of Avila, The Book of My Life, by Mirabilia Starr. Your soft-spoken presence here is surely building on all that is your life.

The Spirit of Clear Communication

Sister Catherine "Kate" Zimmerman

To open the conversation with **Sister Kate Zimmerman**, I explored the topic of her past years in ministry. Her first years in the Congregation were spent teaching in Austin and Waseca, Minnesota, and in Portsmouth, Ohio. The question, "What led you to this ministry?" received the quick response: "I was sent!" This succinct statement was probably true for most of us before the "fresh air" of Vatican II.

Kate's other ministry came out of her request to Mother Callista to study/train in the field of psychotherapy. Kate had become aware of our need as Sisters to communicate more beneficially in all aspects of life. Permission to proceed led to many years in which Kate served so many of us, both Rochester Franciscans and others. Psychotherapy proved to be personally rewarding as well. This is work she liked, indicating that this ministry was a great fit, in contrast to her experience in teaching. She realized that the study of psychotherapy was making good use of her two special gifts: being a good listener and being approachable. One of the best pieces of advice she was given, Kate said, was "Shut up and listen!" This also fit well with what she herself said to Mother Callista about her new ministry. "We make life harder than it has to be," she conjectured, "and really listening to others would greatly improve the quality of living in Community."



S. Kate's earlier role as a therapist.

Kate shared several fulfilling moments in therapy sessions. "In working with a client when I was a therapist, I was able to apologize to her in the name of Sisters and other Church persons who the client felt had been abusive to her emotionally. The client knew I was a Sister, so she responded when I said I was taking off my therapist hat and putting on a Sister's veil... it was a significant point in the woman's therapy and healing."

Another standout memory included five years spent initiating and implementing the Mobile Growth Program of meeting with Convent groups of Sisters in their homes and helping with better communication and problem solving skills. It would be hard to deny that these contributed to the larger mission of Jesus and of our mission as a religious community in the church.

Kate didn't name a favorite book or quotation, but I suspect she probably found deepest solace and wisdom in reading the book of nature. The great outdoors is definitely her favorite place to make retreats, which she values as a high point in her personal life journey. At Assisi Heights, her daily walk around the building is a great and necessary form of being in touch with and informed by nature. (She faithfully continued this walk even after foot surgery as it was healing.) God's Book of Life has many chapters!

Kate envisions the work of the Sisters of Saint Francis today by inviting any inquirer to get rid of, and let go of, stereotypes of Catholic Sisters; we are not who we once were. Her long friendship with Sister Ingrid Peterson has been, and is still, a significant piece of both their lives. When all is said and done, our work of a lifetime is to love one another as God loves us; faithfulness in that endeavor is the major road home.



Sisters of Saint Francis

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