



# FRANCISCAN Prints



Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception • *“A Caring, Praying Presence”* • West Peoria, Illinois

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**Sister Holly Marie Schulz**

## *Reflections*

Living a life devoted to God as a woman religious is a grace I could never have anticipated. Raised as an Episcopalian, I knew very little about Catholicism and even less about sisters and religious life. When my paternal grandmother came to live with us in my early childhood, however, she began to nurture my awareness of God. A practicing Catholic, Grandma faithfully went to Mass and

reconciliation, taught me how to pray the rosary, and explained the scriptural pictures in her missal. A holy, Irish woman, Grandma prayed often and just as frequently warned my sister and me of the consequences of “devilment and shenanigans!” But through her example and our relationship, Grandma taught me God was real, and faith was part of everyday life. These cherished memories reaffirm my belief that anything worthy of our heart and ourselves begins with our “relationship” with God—no matter what one’s vocation may be.

Over the years, I converted to Catholicism and, as my faith deepened, I became more attuned to God’s presence and, eventually, my vocation. In this reflection, I could never give justice to the many ways God has blessed me as a woman religious, as a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the

Immaculate Conception, and in my former, cherished ministry with elders. All my spiritual growth, and all the values I hold dear, flow out of these relationships—beginning and walking with God.

My sisters in community have been instruments of growth and models of virtue in action for me. Each member of our community is one unique part of the whole. But the wisdom of the group opens our eyes and our hearts in ways we could never do alone. Praying together deepens our reliance on God, our ability to discern God’s will, and our desire to be a compassionate presence with those we meet. Equally good, equally gifted, and, yes, equally human, we strive to hold gently the vulnerabilities of one another, remembering God’s patience with our own. But when misunderstandings do occur, we begin again, “knowing our own inadequacies and need for God.” As one of our deceased Sisters once said, “We are all like emery boards for one another, smoothing out our rough edges!”

This issue of *Franciscan Prints* focuses on our former formation directors and our newest member—all of whom have had an impact on my spiritual and communal life. Formation lasts a lifetime, and, whether we are new members or well-seasoned, we form one another through our shared life as vowed women in relationship, who love, trust, and serve God. For us, peace and hope always lie in placing our “total unknown future” into God’s hands—together.

## *Sister Subha Clare Professes Perpetual Vows*

On October 15, 2023, at age 61, I professed final vows as a religious sister with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception in the presence of Sister Kathleen Ann Mourisse, witnessed by Bishop Tylka, my sisters, my family, and many friends, both from Peoria and from throughout the country to support me. It is a day I will cherish forever.

There is a saying that God writes straight with crooked lines, and my journey to final vows is an example of that. I was born into a Brahmin, Hindu family in Chennai, India. My father, who worked for an American company in Chennai, was asked to relocate his family in order to work at the corporate headquarters in New York City; so, at age four, we moved to Queens. While in college, I had an encounter with Jesus and was baptized a Christian in 1983, but I did not follow Jesus. After many crooked lines, I had a second encounter with Jesus in 2006, and this time, I followed. In 2015, I received the sacraments of the Catholic Church at St. Francis of Assisi parish in Manhattan, where I was living at the time.



**Bishop Louis Tylka with Sister Subha Clare Ramesh and members of the Council (Sister Betty Jean Haverback, Sister Kathleen Ann Mourisse, Sister Irene Marie Fritch, Sister Holly Marie Schultz)**

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### Sister Subha Clare (continued)

Two months after I received the sacraments, much to my shock, God put in my heart to become a religious sister. I did not know any religious sisters, so I did not know what they did, or if I wanted to obey God on this call. I met with Sister Chala Marie, the spiritual director of the parish, and told her "I think God is calling me to be a religious sister, but that makes no sense. I am 53 years old, had an arranged marriage, have a son, have been in the corporate world for 30 years, and am a convert." She laughed, and then told me that she was a convert, spent 30 years in the corporate world, was married, had three children, and began discerning religious life at age 55. She then told me that she had been a religious sister for 20 years. I could hear God laughing at both of us!

I discerned with three communities, and within a few minutes of being in the Heading Avenue Franciscan motherhouse, I knew I found my new home. In 2017, I moved to Peoria and became a postulant after being an affiliate for a few months before. The postulant year is a time for further discernment, praying with the sisters, and also working, which I did at St. Joseph's Home in Springfield. I spent time weekly with my formation director, Sister Irene Marie Fritch, learning about the Catholic faith, Franciscan spirituality, and the community. In 2018, I entered the novitiate. Sister Chala Marie told me that the novitiate is a gift of the community to me, and it certainly was. The first year is the canonical year, one of study and prayer. I had classes on Old and New Testament, Church history, Franciscan spirituality, the Sacraments, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, moral theology and others, taught by my sisters and several priests. Being a lifelong learner, I also studied the lives of many saints, the documents of Vatican II, and any theology book I could find.

Towards the end of my canonical year, Sister Kathleen Ann asked me what area I was most interested in for my ministry. I told her that while I was successful according to the world's standards, I felt broken, yet, I knew God was healing me. I wanted to bring God's love and mercy to those who are broken. She suggested I study at Creighton University to receive training in spiritual and retreat direction -- I also obtained a Master's in Christian Spirituality -- as well as consider a ministry with Cursillo. Later that week, Deacon Rick Miller asked me to consider a ministry with Cursillo, so in January 2020, I became a spiritual director of Cursillo.

During the second year of the novitiate, I attended classes both at Creighton and in community, and began a ministry with Cursillo. I professed temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for three years in 2020. At my final vows ceremony, I professed these vows for the rest of my life. In living the vow of poverty, I am free to be dependent on God, and not be attached to anyone or anything but God. It allows me to live with gentle indifference, trusting God to provide whatever He wishes for me. The vow of chastity allows me to love everyone, and not be tied to any specific relationship. I am free to love whoever God puts in my path, and to be sensitive to the needs of others. The vow of obedience allows me to be in continuous communication with God. The word obedience comes from the Latin word "to listen." This vow allows me to turn to God constantly, and to discern His will for me, not just for my life, but in the moment. With these three vows, I wish to live as a compassionate presence to others, the charism of my community. My formation did not end with my final vows. Formation continues for the rest of my life on earth. I am grateful God called me in 2015 to religious life. As Sister Subha Clare, I believe I am becoming the person God created me to be, making straight my crooked lines.

### *Meditation*



Sister Betty Jean  
Haverback

On February 2, our Community celebrated our 133rd birthday. There have been many profession ceremonies over these years, as well as sisters who have had the guidance and formation throughout these years to develop and live our charism to make God's compassionate presence known. Our vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience have been lived and challenged in these ever-evolving times. We, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception, keep listening to and learning what God asks of us.

February 14 began our Lenten journey of 40 days, calling us to stillness and deepening our prayer, fasting, and generosity. In these days of mercy, may our hearts continue to be open to the mystery of life, death, and resurrection so that through God's grace the spirit of unity and peace will be with us and with all people of good will.

*The Sisters of St. Francis  
thank all of you,  
our friends, who have  
supported our Dinner  
Auction over the years.*

*We will not be holding a  
Dinner Auction this year.*

*Thank you for your  
faithful generosity to  
our community.*



## *Sisters Spotlight: Formation Directors*

When a woman enters the process of discerning religious life with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception, the entire community assists in guiding and mentoring her. Five of our current sisters have had the role of formation director, helping to teach, mentor, and form these women into Heading Avenue Franciscans: Sister Mary Patricia Masterson, Sister Jacqueline Schroeder, Sister Janice Keenan, Sister Paula Vasquez, and Sister Irene Marie Fritch (current formation director.) Together, these five sisters have been in final vows for 270 years, and are respected by the community to form new members as well as help the women and the community discern if religious life and life in this community is God's will for the women.

Each of these five formation directors entered the Heading Avenue Franciscans at age 17 or 18, and each went through the formation process. Four of these sisters had Sister Mary Patricia as their formation director. "Not too long after I became formation director, Vatican II took place bringing many changes in the church, thus bringing changes in religious life, also affecting formation. Fewer permissions were required by the women in formation, and changes in the habit took place. Many novices went through this step by step, and novices could choose when they desired to make final vows, with consultation with the President. Also, novices and postulants were able to express their opinions more than when I was in the novitiate," said Sister Mary Patricia.

All of these formation directors noted that they personally changed during their formation process. Sister Jacqueline stated, "I grew from a teenager to an adult. I learned how to do things by doing them. I learned how to pray, how to listen, how to enter into contemplation, mostly thanks to my 30-day Ignatian retreat before final vows." Sister Irene



**Sister Paula Vasquez, Sister Janice Keenan, Sister Jacqueline Schroeder, Sister Irene Marie Fritch. Seated Sister Mary Patricia Masterson**

noted, "I definitely matured and also discovered gifts and talents that I did not know I had. I firmly believe that the loving attitude and confidence that the sisters had in me gave me the courage to learn and to try new things." Sister Mary Patricia noted, "I learned that living the religious life was the best teacher because this involved being with my sisters, seeing their good and bad sides, truly accepting them and being grateful for their accepting me as I was, far from perfect."

As postulants and novices, these five sisters completed their undergraduate education, and some began their Master's education. Higher education has always been important to the Heading Avenue Franciscans. All of them also received their teaching certification. Upon professing temporary vows, these five sisters, along with other Heading Avenue Franciscans, became teachers and principals in Catholic schools throughout the diocese of Peoria.

When these five sisters were asked to become formation directors, all responded, "Yes," but with apprehension. As Sister Paula stated, "I wondered, could I do it? Could I tailor the program to fit the individual discerning religious life?"

The president of the congregation was wonderful in assisting and affirming me for this ministry of formation director." Sister Janice noted, "I had to learn to continually put my trust in God in the formation process and in the women entering that process. I had to learn humility and that my limitations were real and that I would make mistakes and needed to accept being human. I tried to do my best and leave it in the hands of God, trusting in God as well as the women and the sisters, as we were all in it together." None of these sisters had special training

to become formation directors, but their lives in community were the best teachers. Their courses in theology, Franciscan spirituality, spiritual direction, and experiences as teachers and principals provided these formation directors with the necessary tools and gifts to serve in this ministry.

Sister Paula noted that the greatest opportunity of being a formation director was "assisting a woman in discerning if this is the life to which God is calling her, as well as using her gifts and talents which are God-given for His greater honor and glory." Sister Irene commented that "the greatest opportunity of being a formation director for the community was to involve the other sisters in the congregation in the formation process. This interaction would provide opportunities to discover the gifts of each sister and share their personal history with the candidate, as well as our rich congregational history." For Sister Janice "being a formation director was a time when the Paschal Mystery became deeply personal. It was a privileged place to be as the women shared so much of themselves with me, and I tried to impart to them the reality of being a community mem-



## *Sisters Spotlight (continued)*

ber and answering the precious call from God. It was a ministry of assisting the women to be the special unique person God created them to be all the while being integrated into a unique community of women. I found formation ministry to be the most intense of any I have had and the ministry where I grew the most personally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.”

“Formation is the work of God. In both being formed and serving as a formation director, it was readily apparent that God is in charge – and it works much better when we let Him show us the next step to take. There is far less grief and stress when we remember that in our daily life and ongoing formation as well,” noted Sister Jacqueline. Each of these formation directors display qualities of religious women, prayerful, good listening skills, leading by example not just words, and most importantly, humility, which makes each of them strong formation directors, and Heading Avenue Franciscans. As each formation director stated, formation continues for all of us and only ends when we go home to God, as grow closer to God, to our sisters, and to ourselves.



*The Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception invite you to join us in prayer this Lenten season.*

*Please join us for the Stations of the Cross from Mary's perspective on Friday, March 22 at 7pm.*

*Listing of benefactors and donors will be presented in our next newsletter.*

*Remember special occasions and honor friends and loved ones with a memorial or honorarium gift to the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception. For a special bequest in your will, please talk with your legal advisor. We thank God, as we thank you, for your support, whether spiritual or financial. Prayer is our best and deepest expression of gratitude.*