

URSULINE

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Amy Olson and Kevin Wadle
Ursuline Associates



Embracing Our Future with Hope
Carrying Forward the Charism of Angela

Amy Olson and Kevin Wadle, Ursuline Associates

BY KATHY WILLIAMS

On a beautiful summer evening recently, Amy Olson and Kevin Wadle sat on their back deck and explained what being Ursuline Associates has meant to them both individually and as a couple. Every year since they were married, Kevin and Amy have chosen one new subject, hobby or activity to

position for Sacred Heart Schools (SHS). She heard about the Ursuline Associates from the then Director of Associates, Theresa Butler, and also found out that some friends of theirs, Kim and Bobby Sison, from their home parish, St. Leonard, were Ursuline Associates. When Amy found

out that men also could become Associates, she told Kevin about it, and suggested it as their activity for the year.

Fast forward to 2018, and Amy and Kevin are as excited about the Associates Program as they were when they first joined in 2014! When asked what becoming an Associate will bring to your

life, Kevin said that, “You have to jump in and commit to something that challenges you. You have classes twice a week for approximately eight months while you are in formation. After formation, you can be in a small group. Our small group meets four times a year on Sunday afternoon for discussion after reading our ‘assigned’ materials. It’s like exercise—after we meet, you are so glad you carved out that time.”

Associates are people that can come from different walks of life, but share the same beliefs. Rather than tell people they are Associates, or tell them they are Christians, Kevin says that the Associates try to live their Christianity, and explains, “There is

THE CHARISM

of Saint Angela Merici and the Ursuline Sisters of Louisville is a contemplative love of God and a resulting openness and eagerness to serve the needs of others.

a difference between vocalizing it, and living it so people want to be like you, by the example you show. The Ursuline Sisters are living examples of this. They do not talk about everything they have done or are doing; they just live it. And people see that as so real.”

As Director of Mission Effectiveness for SHS, Amy has recruited several Associates from the staff of the Sacred Heart Schools. Amy also wanted to start intergenerational activities and programs with the schoolchildren and Ursuline Sisters in order to build a connection between the two groups. Together with the Sacred Heart Preschool director, she started a program whereby Ursuline Sisters are assigned to a classroom. The Sisters visit with that class throughout the year. The children and Sisters grow very close, send each other cards and notes, and pray for each other.

Kevin said one of the preschool children told someone, “I have a sister! Her name is Sister Macrina.” Amy said the friendship between the preschoolers and Sisters is amazing—that the children pray for the Sisters and treat them like rock stars when they visit. They talk to their pictures that hang on bulletin boards throughout the school. She added, “We don’t know how far this will go in terms of awareness. Some people



Amy, Elise, Gabrielle and Kevin on Elise’s First Communion day at St. Leonard Parish, Louisville

learn. They sometimes will venture out on their own to explore the chosen area, but often do it together.

One year, their new subject was to sign up to become foster parents. As a result of that ministry, Amy and Kevin have a foster daughter in their lives, Elise, who came to them as a newborn and who now lives with another family. Elise visits often and stays with them for holidays and long weekends. They also have a biological daughter, Gabrielle, who just completed her freshman year at Murray State University.

Amy was teaching on the Ursuline Campus at Sacred Heart Preschool in 2015 and had just applied for the Director of Mission Effectiveness

don't go to Mass; where else are the children going to get this one-on-one experience with a Sister? This is one of the ways the Ursuline Charism can live on."

Sacred Heart Academy (SHA), the girls' high school on campus, has a Charism Class that the students take their senior year. They learn about Saint Angela—how she gathered a group of women and founded the Company of Saint Ursula. This company presented a third way of life for women when marriage and cloister were the only alternatives. Her followers lived in their homes and went about their accustomed duties, paying attention to the way they served and the love that motivated them.

One of the students who took the course this past year said of the class, "Through the Charism course we learn better how to be strong women of great faith. I believe that being a strong woman of great faith embodies what Angela wanted women to be

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Art project from the Charism Class at Sacred Heart Academy

like." One of Amy's hopes that will result from the Charism Class is an increase in younger women as well as men joining the Associates.

The students also begin to see the Sisters as real people once they get to interact with them in small groups during class. Amy stated that, "As a result of having the Sisters visit in class, the girls can see them as approachable. It is an extension of community. We are showing them that we are part of this bigger community and making connections."

This connection becomes real for adults, as well. When you enter the Associate Program, you are paired with a "seasoned" Associate or Ursuline Sister as your companion. In Amy and Kevin's case, they were paired with Ursuline Sisters—Kevin with Sister Rosella McCormick, and Amy with Sister Rita Dressman.

They both have a very close relationship with their companion Sisters; in fact, they call Sister Rosella "Rosie." They said that they hope all Associates have such a good relationship with their mentors as it has greatly enhanced their lives.

Kevin says that, "One of the best parts of being an Associate for me is being in community with my companion, Sister Rose."

Both Kevin and Amy think the Ursuline Associate Program is the best kept secret around! They emphasized that it is not a one-year formation and then you have arrived. Kevin added, "It is a journey. It is about lifelong formation, about growing your faith." They think many people would be interested in being an Ursuline Associate because so many people now are seeking and looking for something bigger than themselves. And, because the reading and discussions change every year, it is ever-changing, and meets you where you are spiritually.

As a married couple, they say that it has brought them closer because they discuss the topics from the readings. When their daughter Gabby was a senior at SHA, she was in the Charism Class, and they were able to discuss what she was learning and share as a family. And, now that they have "graduated" from formation and are in the small group, Kevin says,



Amy with her companion, Sister Rita Dressman

“Before it was looking at the forest, now you start to see the trees,” regarding the subject matter and the spirituality.

Then there are the little things, like how it applies to your everyday life. For example, at Mass recently, Kevin said the priest mentioned the word “charism” and they were both so pleased that they knew what that word meant! Kevin added, “Charism is a word that is not used often, but it is a wonderful way to say that this is your purpose. For example, this year my charism is X, but it doesn’t mean it cannot change and my charism becomes something else.”

Kevin said that for men, the attraction to join the Associates

level than we are—they know in what direction they are moving.”

Amy added, “We are constantly amazed that we have something in common with Saint Angela Merici, this woman from the 1500s. The Associate model is actually closer to what Saint Angela originally envisioned for her Company of Saint Ursula. Her Companions lived in their own homes and came together for fellowship and faith-sharing. They didn’t dress alike; they wore the clothing of their individual work or ministry. It is as if we have come full circle. That is very powerful. The Associates come together and strengthen one another, and then go back and do the kind of work you are called to do in the world.”

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Kevin with his companion, Sister Rosella McCormick

would be the chance to participate in a quest to strengthen his own spirituality. He added that it’s rare for someone to do it on his own, since we are intrinsically formed to be in community with each other.

Part of the attraction for Amy and Kevin is the draw to be close to the Ursuline Sisters and learn about these amazing women. Kevin said, “There is so much history behind these strong women and what they have accomplished over the past 160 years in Louisville. You always leave feeling rejuvenated. All you have to do is be around the Sisters for any length of time. They have a peace about them; they are at a different

The Associates are open to the Holy Spirit and truly carrying on the Charism of Saint Angela, which is “a contemplative love of God and a resulting openness and eagerness to serve the needs of others.” They are finding new ways to continue the Ursuline Sisters of Louisville’s mission of a life of prayer, community and participation in the teaching mission of the Church.

For more information on the Ursuline Associate Community, please contact Bay Baltes, Director of the Associate Community via email: bbaltes@ursulineslou.org or by phone at (502) 896-3956.