

Sister Theresa Kruml (Stanislaus) Parish Ministry in Iowa

BY KATHY WILLIAMS

Sister Theresa Kruml found her calling early in life. When she was in third grade, a priest told Sister Theresa that one day she would be a religious Sister, and “that was it,” she said. She never changed her mind after that. As she looks back on her childhood, she loved going to Mass and the parish missions, so the priest must have seen something in her. It was these little things that formed her, as well as the influence of her family, who were very devout Catholics. One of her sisters, Georgia Jean Kruml, is also an Ursuline Sister of Louisville.

From 1948 to 1950, her freshman and sophomore years of high school, she attended St. Patrick Academy in Sidney as a boarder. She met the Ursuline Sisters of Louisville at St. Patrick. “I loved the sisters and would assist with the little grade school children or any other tasks to be near the sisters. When word came that Mother Rosalin Schaeffer, then the Ursulines’ Mother Superior, was



Sister Theresa with the Tuesday Bible study class at Saint Wenceslaus Parish, Iowa City, Iowa

become an Ursuline Sister. Mother Rosalin requested written permission from her father, due to Theresa’s young age. So, during halftime at a football game, she and her father met behind his car to sign the paperwork. At 16, the high school senior left on her first plane ride to Louisville to enter the convent!

Sister Theresa entered the convent on Sept. 8, 1950. A graduate of Ursuline College, Creighton University and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, she earned master’s degrees in education and pastoral theology.

She taught for 33 years in schools in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Nebraska. After retiring from teaching, she studied clinical pastoral education at Humana Hospital-University of Louisville. She earned certification as a Catholic hospital chaplain and was in ministry at Methodist Medical Center in Peoria, Illinois for nearly seven years.

Sister Theresa then moved to Iowa City, Iowa in 1994. She worked

at Mercy Iowa City Hospital as a paid chaplain until 2013, and then retired at the age of 79. Now, she is a volunteer chaplain at the hospital, as well as at Mercy Home Health.

The parish ministry piece for Sister Theresa comes at Saint Wenceslaus, a parish of approximately 700 families. Sister Theresa serves in several ministries at the parish, including leading the RCIA program.

Sister also teaches the second grade Reconciliation class at Saint Wenceslaus. Sister says the second graders each give her a little wave when they come up for a blessing at Communion. “There is such joy in their faces because they know they will receive the Eucharist in May.” The catechumens whom Sister Theresa works with in RCIA shake her hand when they come into Mass. She says, “They develop a relationship with me and the parish and know they are part of the family.”

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visiting St. Patrick, Sister Theresa sought her out to ask if she could



Sister Theresa with her young friend, Gabriel

wherever she goes. As she explains it, “I try to have a cheerful smile for everyone I meet, and people seem to respond to that. Or, as I like to call it, ‘The Ripple Effect of Grace.’” She has several stories of meeting strangers who are now dear friends and who have entered the Church as a result of an encounter with her.

young woman who is entering the Church wanted to get her husband into RCIA, but Sister Theresa could see he wasn’t quite ready. She told her, “Dear, you have to let grace operate on its own time.”

Sister Theresa seems to have a perpetual fountain of energy! She unlocks the church every weekday

morning at 6 am for the 7 am Mass. She leads a Bible study every Tuesday morning after Mass, and ministers to the homebound and those living in assisted living/nursing homes. Additionally, she uses old t-shirts to make cloth diapers to send to Nicaragua and makes little dresses for impoverished girls in South Africa.

She loves to bring Communion to anyone in need. The parish youth

minister, Ellen Poliskey, recalls that, “Last year my son, Gabriel, was born the evening of Easter Sunday. I was in labor all day and hadn’t received Communion. Sister Theresa came over to the hospital late at night to bring me Communion so I could receive Jesus on Easter. “ Gabriel and Sister are now best buddies!

Sister Theresa says she has loved everything she has done in religious life. During the 33 years that she taught school, her goal was to make learning exciting for the kids, and that is how she approached teaching. She thinks that children will rise to your expectations of them if you call out their gifts. She also applies this to the adults she works with now, as well. She says simply, “I just want people to be better for having known me.”

In her office hangs this prayer of Blessed John Henry Newman, which she prays daily, and is her life motto:

Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with Your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly, That my life may only be a radiance of Yours.

*Shine through me, and be so in me
That every soul I come in contact with
May feel Your presence in my soul.
Let them look up and see no longer me,
but only Jesus!*

*Stay with me and then I shall begin to
shine as You shine,
So to shine as to be a light to others;
The light, O Jesus, will be all from You;
none of it will be mine;
It will be you, shining on others through me.*

*Let me thus praise You the way You love
best, by shining on those around me.
Let me preach You without preaching,
not by words but by my example,
By the catching force of the sympathetic
influence of what I do,
The evident fullness of the love my heart
bears to You.
Amen.*

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She tells of such an encounter with a man who followed her down the aisle of the grocery store, informing her, “You know, I’m an atheist.” She said to him in reply, “That’s nice, I hope you are a good one.” He ended up buying supplies for her to take to the crisis center she was going to that day!

As Sister Theresa says, “You’ll never bring anyone to the Church unless you’re welcoming and accepting.” One