

Show me a sign

A GUIDE FOR DISCERNING RELIGIOUS LIFE

2018



"What a blessing and grace-filled way of life that I've grown to know."



Growing a strong foundation of faith

From pulling weeds in the family garden to driving a tractor across acres of farmland in central Minnesota, Lucy Slinger learned from her parents the values of caring for all creation. These values led her to pursue an undergraduate degree in biology and a master's in plant pathology. Both degrees propelled her into agricultural research and a job with the Cooperative Extension Service in Michigan. Later she earned a doctorate in curriculum and instruction, science K-12, with an emphasis on teacher development and in environmental education.

As a professor in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, her own education was

enhanced by an opportunity to provide in-service education for U.S. Department of Defense instructors stationed around the world.

After checking off travel to all continents, Lucy embarked on another expedition. This time, led by a deep attraction to the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, she began her formal quest to grow in Franciscan spirituality. It led her to the nurturing soil of the Secular Franciscans. This group of lay women and men continue to live Franciscan values in the context of their own lives. Sensing a call to deepen her commitment to the Franciscan way of life, Lucy began

exploring religious life with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. After mutual discernment and a nine-year incorporation process, Sister Lucy professed final vows on August 7, 2010, securing her roots in community life and mission.

When asked how religious life has provided her an opportunity to pursue her passion

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 **Franciscan Sisters**
of Perpetual Adoration
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for the environment, she replied: “Choosing to become an FSPA in mid-life was not an easy change, but it has brought me peace that surpasses all understanding, as we hear about in the Bible. As a member of this community I am challenged to authentically be all that I can be. I know with unquestionable certitude that I am supported and loved by a group of wonderful, independent, creative women. Being a part of community has clearly amplified what I can do with my life in ways that I could never do as a single Catholic woman. Being an FSPA enlarges, enables and enhances, as well as supports and encourages, my work for the cosmic, common good. As an FSPA, I continue the tradition started by St. Francis of Assisi and continued by Pope Francis to care for creation. What a blessing and grace-filled way of life that I’ve grown to know.”

Sister Lucy carries forward FSPA's tradition of education as an instructor at Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and as the ecological advocate for FSPA. As an instructor she continues to teach sustainability and ecospirituality. She also supervises interns as they navigate the first days of identifying plants and weeds to developing their own research projects. Students from area schools come to the garden to extend their own classroom learning. Hundreds of visitors are enriched as they explore sustainable growing practices. Sister Lucy supervises volunteers as they bring in the annual garden harvest — a harvest weighing four to five tons. As ecological advocate she keeps the congregation updated and networks with multiple organizations promoting sustainable practices. 🌱

Sister Lucy shares resources at www.fspa.org. Look under **Ministries**, **Ecological Advocacy** for presentations, articles and more.



BY SISTER ROCHELLE POTARACKE, FSPA



It is essential to begin each new day with prayer. Spending time with God in prayer helps focus our hearts and direct our minds for the many tasks of the day.

Dear Lord,

Teaching is my call, my gift. I stand before you each day asking for your support and help. May I remember that Jesus encourages us to see all children as a gift to our world.

As I begin each day, help me remember the call of the Gospel to love. May my actions, rather than my words, direct my students.

I want to teach my students the beauty of their own lives, and the beauty of all lives.

I want to teach my students to look and to see the beauty of God’s creation all around.

I want to teach my students how to understand right from wrong, and teach them how to become a support to classmates.

I want to teach lessons that are not always printed in a book, the real lessons of life.

I want to teach my students the importance of learning and a good education so that they can go out in the world and have success in whatever fields they choose.

Help me, God, to teach as Jesus taught through love, respect and understanding. Help me direct each student in a path to goodness. Amen.

~ Sister Rochelle Potaracke, FSPA

Sister Rochelle Potaracke has served as an educator for 58 years. She has been a classroom teacher, supervisor for student teachers and board member for different education boards. This ministry has taken her to different places including Wisconsin, Alaska and Zimbabwe. She currently serves as a supervisor for student teachers at Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Ask a sister: Q&A series with our Franciscan community



“The education process itself deepens and expands as the teacher engages students in the process of learning to learn, to compare and contrast, to reason deeply, to think critically.”

Sister Beth Saner, FSPA

Sister Beth Saner

pictured right with Sister Laurie Sullivan, FSPA

Q: How did you get involved in the field of education?

A: As a new Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration in 1966, our options were hospital work or education. I registered as a medical technology major but had no idea what that would mean. When we toured the hospital, it occurred to me that I would have to work there. Yikes! I changed my major to music education the next day. A Catholic sister who knew me well said to me, “I wondered how long it would be until you came to your senses.” It had been six weeks.

Q: What has been your ministry experience?

A: I was an elementary teacher for one year, then a high school teacher for two years. I spent the next 18 years working in the music department at the college level as well as in campus ministry. I was also the choir director for 14 years for the Diocese of La Crosse in Wisconsin. For the past 20 years I have been a spiritual director, 18 of those years co-facilitator of the Spiritual Direction Internship at the Claret Center, Chicago, Illinois. I have also been guiding women in our FSPA incorporation process — the stages

to the profession of perpetual vows — for the past 16 years. Each experience provided a stepping stone into the next opportunity.

Q: What has been your favorite or most inspiring time in ministry?

A: I loved my years as a college faculty member. Working with college students and adults returning to school was always satisfying to me. In hindsight, what I do now was hidden in what I was doing then. I was an informal listener and companion. I listened as students spoke about their struggles in school, in making their lives work, their relationships, deciding what to do next or next year ... I was never much of an “advice giver” since I really had no idea what they should be or do in most instances. I did invite them to hear and think through what they were saying and make choices.

Q: How do you see your current ministry as an evolution of FSPA's tradition of education?

A: On the surface, education appears to be about imparting information and concepts. The education process itself deepens and expands as the teacher engages students in the process of learning to learn, to compare and contrast, to reason deeply, to think critically. When I was hired as a

teacher, the focus of my contract was to do that. However, teachers also have a relationship with their students. Teachers often become mentors and confidants for students who need a place to process their lives and the experiences they are having. I was always one of those teachers who had students at the door seeking extra help and just needing to talk. Today, my ministry is focused on listening to others as they hear themselves in their own ongoing search for meaning and for the holy in their lives. Both spiritual direction itself and the training internship focus on the invitation to trust one's experience and to live into its invitation to wholeness.

Q: What wisdom would you share with discerners considering religious life and education as a field of ministry?

A: Trust your experience. Trust your inner voice as it forms the question, “Is this for me?” Listen both within and around you. Notice what you notice. Find someone to chat with about your nudges. Listen to what you hear yourself say as you share your heart. There is just so much to learn every day. Serving the growth of the kingdom as an educator puts you right in the midst of that learning. 🌹

Spotlight on sisters: The legacy of education ministry



Sister Georgia Christensen

continues to serve in the ministry of education by teaching a weekend servant leadership class in Wisconsin's Superior Diocese. She also serves on higher education boards in addition to her duties as FSPA congregational secretary.



Sister Marcella Steffes' ministry as a music teacher spans 67 years. She continues to teach music to elementary and high school students through lessons offered at Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin. She also shares her gift of music by playing cello for the FSPA Schola Choir at St. Rose Convent.



Sister Diane Boehm currently teaches English as a Second Language. Her patience and care for her students is as remarkable as her determination to help anyone struggling with a language barrier.



Sister Virdean Meyer has moved from the elementary and high school classrooms to working in a parish. One of her responsibilities includes preparing adults for Catholicism through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. An inquiring mind and desire to learn is a gift at any age!



Sister Kathy Roberg has embraced technology, teaching English to students from around the world. Sister Kathy traveled to Prague, Czech Republic, volunteering as a teacher of English as a Second Language. Now, from her home in Spokane, Washington, she connects with students online and checks in on their progress.



Sister Laura Nettles enjoys the rigors of academia as a full-time college professor and Ph.D. candidate. She continues the sisters' ministry at FSPA-founded Viterbo University where she has taught for 10 years in the Religious Studies Department.



Sister Kathleen Mitchell, once an elementary school teacher and pastoral minister, has completed requirements in the doctor of ministry degree at Chicago Theological Union and is the Associate Dean of Formation and the Associate Director of the Teaching Parish Program at Mundelein Seminary in Illinois. She teaches theology to men discerning priesthood and mentors them in their parish experiences.

DID YOU KNOW?

FSPA's early history in La Crosse, Wisconsin, included educating children and care for orphans. Sisters addressed their own educational needs by founding St. Rose Normal School which served as a higher education facility where they studied to minister in the education field. St. Rose Normal School developed into what is today known as Viterbo University.

Through the years, FSPA have staffed scores of schools around the nation and have provided religious education for children and adults, tutoring for new immigrants, and training in many other areas.



Discerners seeking direction: Common discernment questions

Q: What are the sisters' ministries today?

A: I remember asking this question while researching congregations. I wanted to know if my interests and areas of expertise would fit within the congregation's ministry. It was a way for me to prioritize potential congregations. My hope was to shrink the list from hundreds of congregations to a few to research in depth. It helped, but over time, I discovered there were other aspects to consider.

Now as the director of membership, the information I offer includes more about the congregation's spirituality, mission, prayer life and community living. Many congregations have similar ministries, but their spirituality, mission, prayer life and community living affect how ministry is conducted. For example, Franciscans, Dominicans and Ursulines are rooted in education, yet how they teach is different. Just ask former Catholic school students to describe the congregation of sisters who taught them. You will hear how the type of congregation influenced their education. Differences arise in the celebration of patronal feast days and core values. Each congregation has its own "sub-culture" in the wider scope of religious life within the Catholic Church.

If you have a relationship with a few congregations and they have similar ministries such as education, ask about the different ways they serve that field.

A few other questions include:

- How do they define educational ministry?
- Is it possible to observe or volunteer with a sister for a day to witness ministerial life?
- Do they serve outside the U.S.?
- Do they work in public or private school settings?
- Do they work in bilingual classrooms?

Each answer will show how congregations differ. Is there room for your own growth over time? Can you transition to a different grade level or into a different ministry with education experience? Is there flexibility?

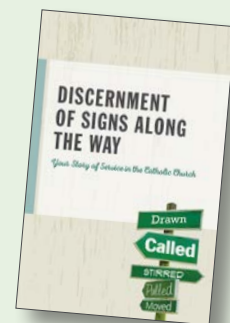
Questions bring clarity to what on paper looks simple. You may be surprised to discover that a congregation you weren't sure about is the better fit.

Sister Amy Taylor

How will you know if a vocation to religious life is a call for you?

Reserve your complimentary copy of **"Discernment of Signs Along the Way: Your Story of Service in the Catholic Church,"** a 24-page reflection journal with guides, questions and connections.

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*“Being a part of community has clearly amplified
what I can do with my life in ways that I could
never do as a single Catholic woman.”*

Sister Lucy Slinger, FSPA



Read Sister Lucy's story “Growing a strong
foundation of faith” on pages 1–2.



Connect with your feet

Franciscan Spirituality Center La Crosse, Wisconsin, www.fscenter.org

Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center Arbor Vitae, Wisconsin, www.marywoodsc.org

Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center Hiawatha, Iowa, www.prairiewoods.org

Global Awareness Through Experience www.Gate-Travel.org



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