

# Show me a sign

A GUIDE FOR DISCERNING RELIGIOUS LIFE

Drawn

Called

STIRRED

Pulled

Moved

SPRING 2017



*“The arts have a way of inspiring a love for learning ...”*



## Cultivating beauty through generations

For more than 160 years the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration have cultivated beauty through their leadership, encouragement and support of the fine arts. Many women with natural ability for the arts joined the community and offered their talents to the students and others they encountered in schools and parishes. Along with the required core courses, FSPA taught music, art, drama and appreciation for literature—creating lessons without the aid of text books. The arts have a way of inspiring a love for learning and creating communities committed to the flourishing of each generation—communities committed to collaboration rather than competition. In

an effort to provide a common curriculum for music, FSPA published the “St. Rose Hymnal” and taught generations of students four-part harmony. There seemed to be nothing that would stop the community from glorifying God through the arts.

A story from our past reminds us today what commitment and dedication to the arts require. The sisters lived very simply, but the cost of mission and food was more than the fledgling community could afford. One day, a sister returned with the small necessities for the dinner table and a painting she purchased at the market. As they sat down for their meal she shared with them the

importance of food for the soul—even in the direst of circumstances—that arts provide. The painting was hung in the chapel to glorify God and to inspire each sister. As the community grew in size, the need for a larger chapel arose. Mother Antonia promised to God to build one as glorious as means would allow. Coin by coin, sisters joined in the effort to build the chapel by

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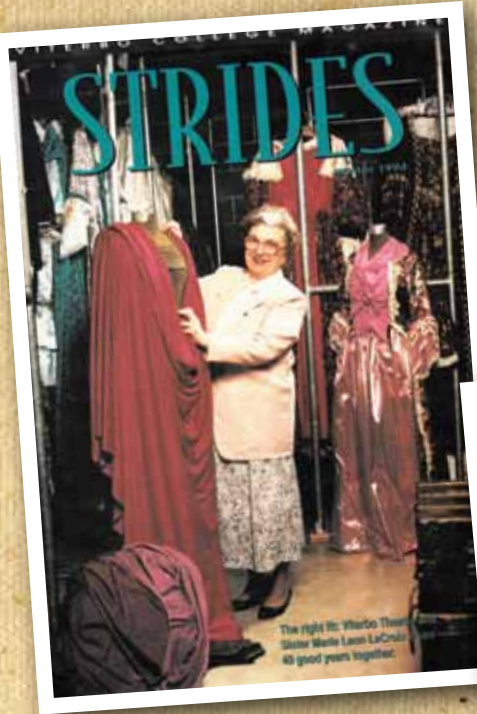
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*“Lifting voices, paint brushes and pens in the name of God  
is in the very lifeblood of FSPA.”*

sending in all they could; sacrificing for the good of the whole community. The greater La Crosse community pulled together to donate to the sisters who so diligently served the city in schools, parishes and the hospital. With initial funding, local and international artisans came to La Crosse to contribute their skills. Splendor touched every chapel surface, floor to ceiling. Beauty flowed from the hearts of many as sisters created the paintings that still grace the walls of St. Rose Convent today. Sister artists were selected to stay at St. Rose to create them. An art room was provided. Countless prayers intertwined with the magnificence of each scene upon the canvas.

FSPA's love of the arts was already flourishing on the adjacent Viterbo University campus. Discussions about the construction of a building that would provide a home for a variety of arts began. Diversity of majors grew as the arts attracted more students. Sisters Marie Leon LaCroix, Carlene Unser and Cyrilla Barr, along with FSPA administration, sought to construct the Fine Arts Center (and later the Sister Marie Leon LaCroix Black Box Theatre) for not only Viterbo, but for the city of La Crosse. The scale and magnitude of the project brought its fair share of criticism, but the sisters saw a need and had the courage to continue despite financial challenges. This was nothing new for FSPA as they once again turned to God and area civic community partners. Today, the theatres serve as home to the La Crosse Symphony, traveling Broadway touring companies and Viterbo student-led performances. Theatre majors gain on-the-job training for futures dedicated to inspiring and entertaining others. Dreams can come true! Lifting voices, paint brushes and pens in the name of God is in the very lifeblood of FSPA. May God bless us with new members who also have dreams of cultivating beauty in their ministries. 🌸



**Photos courtesy of FSPA and Viterbo University.** Page 1, Sisters Kiliana Burghauer, Gervina Schilling and Marietta Hackner painting; Sister Sarah Hennessey cantoring. Page 2, Sister Marie Leon LaCroix posing on the cover of Viterbo University's "Strides" magazine; Sister Nina Shephard on the violin and Sister Marcella Steffes playing cello; Sister Grace McDonald viewing the Viterbo Fine Arts Center construction; the Viterbo Fine Arts Center Main Theatre.



## Q: How have the fine arts been a part of your life as an FSPA?



**Sister Marlene Weisenbeck**

*"... the arts have been an inseparable part of the human journey; indeed, we depend on the arts to carry us toward the fullness of our humanity."*

*National Standards for Art Education*

**A:** My involvement in the fine arts started in the first grade, as I was educated by FSPA throughout my grammar, high school and college years. The FSPA had written music curriculum, which was taught in all the grades. At age six I was singing and reading music on a daily basis, learning about sharps and flats. By grade four I could sing the "Dies Irae" from the Latin Requiem Mass by heart because we were taught to sing all the parts of the Mass early in grade school.

In grade six I began to take piano lessons and a couple of years later organ and trumpet lessons, also taught by an FSPA who was probably one of the most influential people in the development of my vocation (though we never talked about that). By grade seven I was playing organ for daily Mass and marching in the high school band.

When I joined FSPA, my desire to study music was solid. I loved learning to play as

many instruments as possible during my college years. I earned a baccalaureate degree in music education at Viterbo College. After four years of teaching music in elementary and high schools staffed by FSPA, I earned a master's degree in piano performance and soon thereafter served as a faculty member in the Viterbo music department. I became the department chairperson during my 18-year tenure there.

My doctoral studies took me in other directions, but still prompted by beauty and an inner song, I earned a doctoral minor in art history. The arts have always been an impetus for the way I approach my ministry throughout life. Their spiritual essence helps me to hear and see reality through a lens of beauty that is part of God's ongoing revelation. Even today I still love to sing and do so as a cantor and member of my community's schola. I can say that the fine arts have been an integral part of my life for the whole of it. 🌹



**Sister Karen Kappell**

*pictured on left*

**A:** Being an artist isn't something I could file away when I decided to be an FSPA. It was important that I felt the arts were valued in community and that I could continue as an artist. Through the years I have not been disappointed, and have encouraged many to get in touch with deeper meaning in their lives by finding the arts as means to express themselves. I do this while I am on staff at one of our three spirituality centers, Marywood. I also have been encouraged and supported in producing and selling art which finds a place in a home, business, clinic or other places. Hopefully it brings

a sense of beauty to the environment. I have been invited to contribute art for community gatherings, brochures and publications. Because art is a creative process and intuitive, it affects the way I work in other areas of life and I find this helpful in serving in my current ministry of leadership. These have been some ways I have used the gifts that I've been given. Through the years I have come to a closer realization of the close fit between serving as an artist and religious sister—and the value of the call to this life and community. 🌹

*continued ...*

**Q: How have the fine arts been a part of your life as an FSPA?**



**Sister Laura Nettles**

*pictured second from left*

**A:** The arts provide a variety of lenses through which we come to see the dignity inherent in all of creation and provides a glimpse of the divine artist.

The arts, music in particular, have always fed my soul. Music, whether listening or performing, is where I find beauty, peace and healing. More importantly, it is where I encounter the divine.

Like Moses and the Burning Bush, God speaks to me through music. I am blessed to be part of a religious community that actively supports my love of music and enthusiastically encourages my membership in various musical groups. Even better, my own spiritual journey has been enriched beyond measure by the artistic creativity of our sisters. Though we are diverse in many ways, the arts have become, for FSPA, a profound medium through which we share our humanity. And our souls are continually nourished. 🌹

## Getting in the flow of vowed life as an artist

### Q & A with Sister Betty Bradley

Sister Betty Bradley currently serves the ministry of artistry. Sister Betty's story shows how God uses our natural gifts and talents to lead us into the mission fields. The canvas of her life is filled with all the ways her ministerial positions have flowed with creativity. She has found ways to continue the FSPA fine arts as she brings out the best in all those she meets.

**Q: How did your vocation lead you to become an artist?**

Throughout my eight years of grade school at St. Ann's in Spokane, Washington, having been taught by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, we had art class every Friday afternoon. This was where I began to love the gift of creativity and artistic expression.

**Q: How is art a part of your spiritual practice?**

To me, art is very meditative. When creating art, I believe God and I are playing together. God is our greatest creator. With God, the creative potential is endless.

**Q: What are the various ways you have used your artistic skills in ministry?**

When I was teaching in elementary schools and as a religious education director, I always tried to encourage and support creativity. It is such a great gift to behold. I have also enjoyed teaching watercolor classes to adults.

**Q: How is being an FSPA part of your journey as an artist?**

While I was ministering as associate director for FSPA Incorporation Office, I lived next door to Sister Margaret Ann Schlosser. She taught oil and watercolor classes, so I decided to take watercolor classes. In this process I discovered I had natural talent for watercolor painting, so I decided to pursue additional education. As a Franciscan Sister, my hope is to continue expressing the goodness of God through my art. 🌹





BY SISTER KAREN KAPPELL

**There are many ways to pray. As you take time to pray about your own gifts and talents, Sister Karen Kappell offers a reflection and poem.**

What are the possibilities you can create with God on the canvas of your life?

The question “What do you want for today, for yesterday, for tomorrow?” brings to mind the “Prayer of Peace,” attributed to St. Francis, and thoughts about what I really wanted in my life for today, yesterday and tomorrow. Being an artist with a good portion of my time spent in creating art, a prayer flows forth:

*Lord make me into a brush in your hands  
Where there is grayness, let me flood color  
Where there is darkness, let me sow light  
Where there is disturbance, let me restore balance  
Where there is blandness, let me dance color,  
For your Beauty is truly brilliant and full of clarity,  
wonderfully colored with variations of all kinds.  
For your Hand holds in perfect balance that center point  
which grants unending movement and great flexibility.  
Grant that I may not hold on to what has been given, but totally allow your  
grace to flow, not crediting myself, but pointing to the Source, and not  
taking control but resting in the hand of the Master Painter.*



~ Sister Karen Kappell, FSPA

## *Connect with your feet*

Contact Sister Amy in the membership office at [membership@fspa.org](mailto:membership@fspa.org) or 888-683-3772. Our website is a great resource for more information about FSPA. Visit [www.fspa.org](http://www.fspa.org).



## **Connect with our mission**

We sponsor three spirituality centers and a cultural immersion program that may help you grow in your spiritual life.

- Franciscan Spirituality Center  
La Crosse, Wisconsin  
[www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org)
- Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center  
Arbor Vitae, Wisconsin  
[www.marywoodsc.org](http://www.marywoodsc.org)
- Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center  
Hiawatha, Iowa  
[www.prairiewoods.org](http://www.prairiewoods.org)
- Global Awareness Through Experience (GATE)  
[www.GATE-travel.org](http://www.GATE-travel.org)

## **Connect with our blog**

“Show me a sign” is published bi-annually. Between issues, follow the blog at [www.fspa.org/showmeasign](http://www.fspa.org/showmeasign).

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## Discerners seeking direction: *Common discernment questions*

### **Q: Is it possible to change careers while serving as a Catholic sister?**

**A:** Yes, it is possible to discern a change of ministry as the spirit is always at work within you and often leads to new experiences of response to the needs of the times. Discernment takes place within community and you will be asked why you feel a change is necessary. Together with community members you will discern the next steps. This is part of the co-creation that is possible when you say “yes” to God’s invitation to serve his people. It is in the everyday experiences

of walking with others that your eyes may be opened to see a particular need. Sometimes additional education or training is necessary to serve. In other circumstances an open heart and willingness to learn from wisdom figures around you will provide all that you need to work in a new ministry. Many FSPA have discerned and moved into different ministerial roles as they saw new needs and recognized their own gifts and talents to serve others.

It is impossible to predict what will unfold over the course of your life. Every day

is an adventure and God is always full of surprises and invitations to grow and co-create with you. If you ask any sister, she will most likely say that her “yes” to religious life opened more doors than she ever imagined. 



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