



**Sisters of
St. Francis
of Assisi**

May 2008

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Dear Friend,

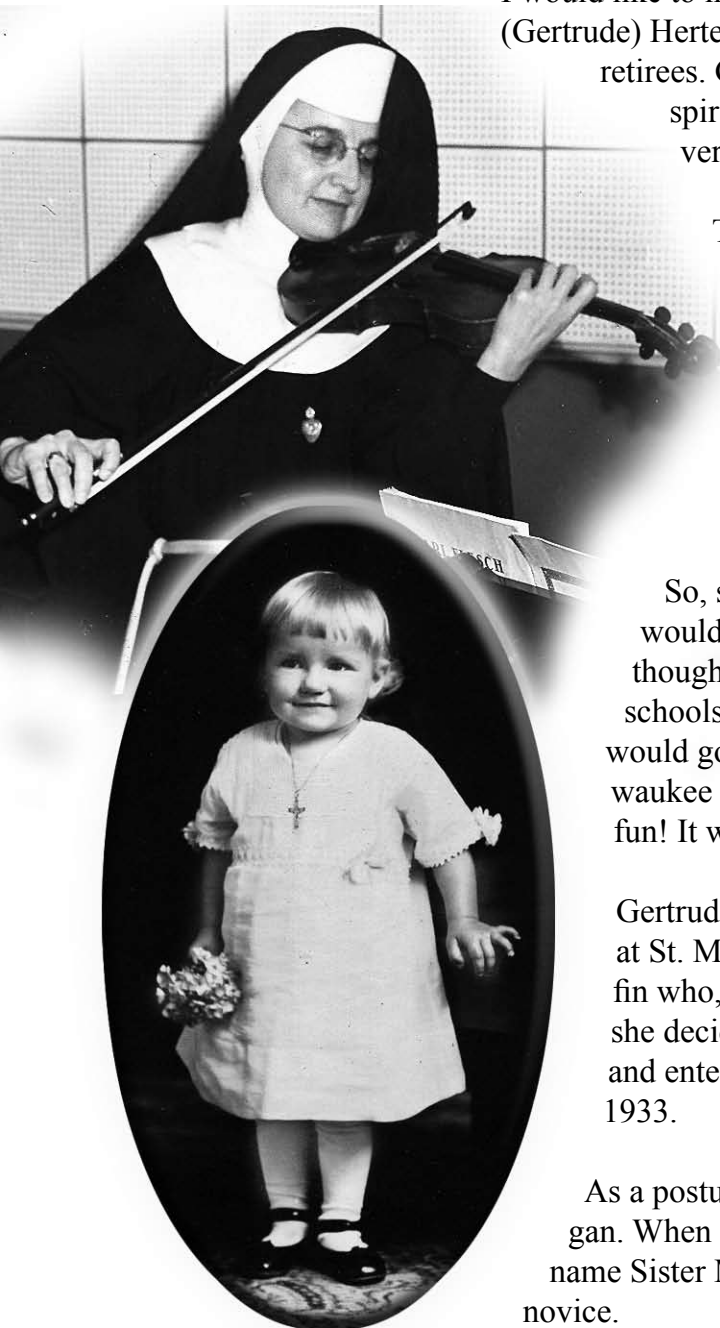
I would like to introduce you to one of our retired sisters, Sr. Romana (Gertrude) Hertel, whom you support through your generosity to our retirees. Gracious, caring, grateful to YOU, clear of mind, deeply spiritual, and stimulating to speak with, you would like her very much.

This gracious lady grew up in Stockbridge, Wisconsin, sixth in a family of ten children born to Jacob and Elizabeth (Steffes) Hertel. Devoutly Catholic, daily family prayer was a strong influence on the children, and her father insisted on a Catholic education for all. The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi taught in the parish school. "We revered them," she recalls with admiration.

So, since her parents were determined that their children would have a Catholic high school education as well, even though that meant the expense of sending them to boarding schools, it was easy to decide that Gertrude and her two sisters would go to St. Mary's Academy, a residential high school in Milwaukee run by the same community. "I loved it! We had so much fun! It was wonderful!" she exclaims.

Gertrude had begun to study music in third grade and continued at St. Mary's. Her first teacher there was Sister Annarose Griffin who, later in life, became her best friend. Upon graduating, she decided to follow her older sister (Sr. Muriel Hertel †2006) and entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi on September 12, 1933.

As a postulant, she began college where she studied piano and organ. When she became a novice on August 2, 1934, she received the name Sister M. Romana. and continued her college studies as a senior novice.





Sr. Romana (standing) spent many years working at Stritch with her life-long friend, Sr. Annarose Griffin (seated).

Below, Sr. Romana was photographed by the *Milwaukee Journal* as she worked on her doctoral dissertation



On August 12, 1936, Sr. Romana professed vows and her first mission was Sacred Heart in St. Francis, where she taught music for a year. It was then that she began studying violin. She was transferred to St. Mary, South Milwaukee, where she taught music until 1942, when she was assigned to teach for a year in Lima, Ohio.

Her next assignment brought her back to the Milwaukee area, where she continued her studies, commuting to the Cosmopolitan School of Music in Chicago.

Sister Romana was the music teacher and organist at St. Agnes Parish, Milwaukee, from 1945-1954. She also taught music at Cardinal Stritch College, and earned her master's degree in violin during that period. She then headed the music department at Stritch from 1954-1960.

The bachelor's and master's degrees in violin were followed by a doctorate in musicology at Catholic University in Washington. Her dissertation was an analysis of the keyboard concertos of Johann Wilhelm Hertel, an obscure 18th century, German composer with whom there MIGHT be a family connection. She found his work exciting because he was on the cutting edge of the evolution from the baroque to the early classical form of composition. She also had the opportunity to be a violinist in concerts of his works, sometimes joined by soloists from the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.

After receiving the doctorate, Sister Romana remained at Cardinal Stritch University, where her good friend, Sr. Annarose, was also on staff. Together they strengthened and expanded the music department. Except for a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities at Ohio State University, 1976-77, she remained a professor of music at Stritch until 1992, when she retired from college teaching.

Her years at Stritch were filled with her life-long passion, music, but it was also the time when she became involved in justice and peace activities. Inspired by campus ministry, particularly by Doris Pehowski, OSF, and Adele Thibaudeau, OSF, (a previous and the current campus ministers), she visited food pantries and homeless shelters, and became involved in peace demonstrations. In addition to her local involvement, she traveled to Washington, D.C., where she did stands for peace at five sites.

So committed to peace and justice, Sister Romana was interviewed by the *Milwaukee Journal* in March of 1988, when she was one of about 50 people who gathered on a bitterly cold downtown street corner to protest U.S. policy in Central America.

According to the *Journal*, “Hertel was carrying two signs. The one she especially liked ... bore an artistically lettered quote from Mark Twain, who, like the Milwaukee protesters, had his differences with American foreign policy. *I am opposed, it read, to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.* ... Her colleagues already know where she stands, she said.”

She also told the reporter that she had taken part in a massive peace rally in New York City about five years earlier, stating that “... she was inspired by “the site of *all those different*

people, all ages, all religions. Since then she has gone on many local marches. Hertel became convinced of the rightness of her protest because:

I felt touched by the presence of God. ... Certainly, Christ stood for peace. ... We're all brothers and sisters of one Father in heaven.”

The reporter surely captured the essence of Sr. Romana’s second passion, peace and justice.

After her retirement from Stritch, she continued to teach private music lessons. She firmly believes that music students need to be exposed to music literature, and that monthly recitals are necessary to learn poise and stage etiquette. Reflecting on this ministry, she said, “I really appreciated the musical education I received from the community.”

Sister Romana retired to St. Francis Community in May 1997. Her friendship with Sr. Annarose Griffin, which had begun during her freshman year in high school, continued until the latter’s death in 2001.

Now in retirement, her interest continues unabated, deepened. Her study on the entire range of questions revolving around issues of justice, peacemaking and care of the earth have intensified. And her active participation continues, so

Milwaukee area sister musicians help Sr. Romana (seated left) celebrate her 90th birthday with her older sister, Sr. Muriel (seated right) on December 3, 2005.

(Left to right) Pictured are Sisters Noreen Zehnpfennig, Joanne Nicgorski, Bernadette Grabrian, Marie Ritzke, Miriam Terese Yost, Mary Ellen Collins and Helen Svancarek.



much so that in 2006 Stritch presented her with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Peacemaker Award.

So no one was surprised, for example, to find Sr. Romana present for a “stand-for-peace” event on a street corner in Milwaukee in March of this year. Bundled in an extra coat layer borrowed from an associate and seated in a folding chair, she braved the cold, blustery weather to “stand” with others in the name of peace.

She is also a resource to those who are just beginning to show concern and to see the interconnectedness of all. She is an obvious role model for those who wish to grow old gracefully. Thank you and God bless you for helping support Sr. Romana and others like her.

Marita Maschmann of

P.S. ~ If you are able, please help us with a contribution once again. Just imagine how much your generosity and your gifts of prayer and support mean to our elderly sisters who, even in retirement, foster the mission and ministry of the congregation.



Sister Romana (standing) celebrated the 70th jubilee of her profession in 2006. She is pictured here with Sr. Dorothea Foertsch (left - †2006) and Sr. Lois Zirbes (right - †2007). At age 92, she is the sole survivor of her profession class.

In her jubilee reflection she wrote: *I am grateful to God for calling me to religious life. It is a full and rich experience. Daily, the participation in Eucharist, the praying of psalms of the Breviary, and meditating on the readings of scripture ... have given more and more meaning to my life. The example and love of my Sisters and the gift of music have made it a time of special graces and blessings.*



The Hertel family is pictured at their Stockbridge, Wis., home. Not shown are two brothers: Anthony who had died and Bill who was not yet born.

At the far right is Gertrude (Sr. Romana), and next to her is her older sister who became Sr. Muriel. The inset above them depicts the “sister sisters” after they entered the congregation.