



**Sisters of
St. Francis
of Assisi**

July 2010

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***Sr. Mary Ann, as a postulant,
is fitted for her work apron.***

Dear Friend,

Most of us will never be mountain climbers but the “hills” of various kinds that we experience in our lives still need a guiding hand. *Psalm 121* came to mind as I began to reflect and write to you about Sister Mary Ann Schroedl (formerly Sr. Rose Agnes).

At the present time, Sister Mary Ann lives on a high hill just outside the rural city of Jefferson, Wisconsin. She helps with pastoral work at St. Lawrence and St. John the Baptist Parishes. Her visits to shut-ins often take her to family, friends and neighbors because she was born just on the other side of the woods from where she is currently living. In a sense, her life has come full circle, returning to the place where she began her life. Her “coming and going” in the intervening years speaks to how God guards our lives.

From the day she was born at home prematurely on February 11, 1934, God has been guarding her life. Her great aunt was the midwife and she created an incubator by lining a shoe box with cloth, placed Mary Ann in the shoe box and set it on the open lid of the stove. This would have been the warmest place in the house in the midst of winter and Mary Ann survived. She was the second of seven children, all girls except for one boy.

When Mary Ann was ready for school she attended the two-room school at St. Lawrence Parish, the “country” parish just outside of Jefferson. Her teachers were Sister Clarine Eiden (Grades 1-4) and Sister Sebastine Schoeberl (Grades 5-8). She graduated from Jefferson High School in 1952. Though her dream had been to go to the University of Wisconsin in Madison to study math, she was discouraged from pursuing this and got a job, instead, at a hardware store in Jefferson as a bookkeeper. The work was interesting, but God was continu-

Psalm 121

*I raise my eyes toward the mountains. From where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.
God will not allow your foot to slip; your guardian does not sleep.
Truly, the guardian of Israel never slumbers nor sleeps.
The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
By day the sun cannot harm you, nor the moon by night.
The LORD will guard you from all evil, will always guard your life.
The LORD will guard your coming and going both now and forever.*

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Above: Sr. Mary Ann visits the home-bound.

Below: An evening of family prayer shared with Sister Mary Ann during her pastoral ministry years.



ing to guard her “coming and going,” and she entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in 1953.

The call to be a sister began when she was a junior in high school, Sister Mary Ann told me. But she was “having too much fun,” so the idea went on the back burner. While she was working as a bookkeeper, the call returned and she followed it. Her aunt, Sister Aloysine Schroedl, and the sisters who taught her in grade school were also an influence on her in quiet ways.

As a postulant, Mary Ann’s bookkeeping skills were put to use helping Sister Florine Schmidt in the finance office. As a second-year novice, she began her teaching career with 54 fourth graders, and she is so grateful to Sister Eileen Wendt who was her helping teacher and mentor. Sister Mary Ann remembers being told that the class she would have had been named “all is calm” by their teacher when they were second graders, but she didn’t feel all that calm in the midst of so many

lively nine-year-olds, the majority being boys!

Of the many interesting experiences she had as a teacher, there are a couple that stand out. One year in a rural parish school, a little boy showed up the first day for second grade. His name wasn’t on the class list so sister added him to it. About a week later she found out that the student had gotten off the bus at the wrong school, but since he



Sr. Mary Ann (upper left) and family celebrate her parents' 57th wedding anniversary in 1989.

liked the school, his mother kept him there for the year. Sister Mary Ann had had no idea of the mix-up because he was fitting in so well. Though not a Catholic, the little boy had managed to mouth all the prayers and engage in all the “Catholic” activities very comfortably.

Another story she tells took place during a music class she was having with her second graders. The principal stopped in with a message for her, so she asked one of the girls to continue with the class. As she was talking with the principal, the principal asked her to turn around and observe the girl who was leading the class because she was imitating Sister Mary Ann very accurately! It was an experience of seeing herself in action.

After 16 years of teaching, sister’s life was guided in the early 1970s into pastoral ministry, which was a new emerging position in Catholic parishes at the time. The pastor where she was teaching had observed how Sister Mary Ann visited all the parents of her students before school began and asked her if she would be willing to do pastoral work in the parish. She was one of the first of our sisters to transition into pastoral work.

Her college degree in education from Cardinal Stritch University now had to be supplemented

with pastoral education studies. Since she was living in Little Canada, Minnesota, it was convenient to take courses at St. Catherine College in St. Paul and St. Benedict’s near Duluth. Little did sister know at that time that her studies would prepare her for 34+ years in pastoral ministry in five different parishes in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Friends tell sister that now she is being rewarded for 50 faithful years of service as a Sister of St. Francis of Assisi. When Sister Mary Ann celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 2006, she made the decision to move into semi-retirement. Mornings are devoted to pastoral ministry and afternoons are spent according to the season. From early spring through autumn, you can find sister in her garden or preserving the yield of her gardening labors.

Last year Sister Mary Ann canned 500 jars of fruits and vegetables. There were 100 jars of pickles of all kinds in addition to carrots, beans, pickled beets, peaches, pears, applesauce and canned apples. She also cans salsa, barbecue sauce, and jams and jellies. All of this is manageable for her because one of her older nephews volunteers time to help her.

She refers to her garden as a “community garden,” and she shares fresh crops and her canned

Sr. Mary Ann (back row, second from left) with her Scripture group.





Sister Mary Ann tends to her infant strawberry patch.

goods generously among the sisters. When sisters come for gatherings, she chooses to serve one of her Franciscan house specials. This is most often beef roast or a chicken dish which features many of her canned vegetables.

Cookies are also a specialty! Sister Mary Ann takes cookies with her on her visits to the homebound. And anyone stopping by the house is offered something to drink and a cookie.

Reflecting on her life, Sister Mary Ann says that without encouragement she would have never chosen to do pastoral ministry. She loved being in the classroom; “My classroom is a bit bigger now,” she says. She has always felt blessed in her ministry and now, living on top of a hill, she feels even closer to God.



At age 76, Sister Mary Ann is so grateful that her health still allows her to minister part time. The psalmist asks in *Psalm 121*, “From where will my help come?” Sister Mary Ann knows that her help comes from God and lives with great trust.

The motto of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi is *Deus Providebit* – God will provide. The sisters in our Congregation strive to live with the same trust in God that St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi did. Part of living in trust is reaching out to others when necessary. We are in a position of needing help with the costs for caring for our frail and elderly sisters. If you are able to help us with a donation, we would be most appreciative.

In turn, we pray daily for our donors and benefactors. May God reward you for your kindness and your generosity and, in the words of the psalmist, may God “guard your coming and going both now and forever.”

In St. Francis and St. Clare,

Marcia Lunz, OSF

Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF



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