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Dear Friend,

When we pray the *Peace Prayer* we ask God to “make me an instrument of your peace... for it is in giving that we receive.” How we can be an ‘instrument of peace’ is a challenge each of us faces. At the end of a long career of teaching and counseling, it is apparent that Sister Felicia (Mary Norbett) Schlechter found many ways to do this personally and professionally.



In 2003, St. Matthew’s school in Oak Creek, Wis., honored Sister Felicia by naming her the “St. Mathew’s Sweetheart.” This award, which had been given only once before, recognizes “someone who is always giving of themselves.” In an article in *The Post* (an independent area newspaper in Milwaukee, Wis.), Linda Hirsch, the sixth grade teacher, said this of Sister Felicia:

“She’s always there for everybody, the students as well as the teachers. We can come to her with any situation. She’s the rock of our staff, you, could say. She’s very optimistic and very knowledgeable. We just really love and respect her.”

Kris Kurtz, a fourth grade teacher, coordinated the celebration with Linda Hirsch, and said it was not a difficult decision to choose Sister Felicia as the honoree. “The award is for someone that has been here; it’s given for longevity, caring, someone who is giving and doesn’t expect anything back. That’s just how Sister Felicia is. She really came right to mind.”



Sr. Felicia (right) as a young girl with her sister, Joanne.

Sister Felicia said she was totally surprised to receive the honor. She had been asked to bring a class to the cafeteria and found the rest of the school there as well. During the ceremony “we laughed, we cried, we had the whole nine yards. They gave me a blessing at the end. To see the whole school of kids with their right hands up blessing was just beautiful.... Part of my prayer every day is to pray for all the kids and their families, their relatives and their friends.”

From 1993 to 2007, Sister Felicia had worked as a supportive consultant and counselor. Now in her fourth year as a volunteer, you can still find her at St. Mathew’s tutoring four days a week during the school day and after school.



Sr. Felicia with her dad, Gus, in 1986, and at her 1991 graduation from Marquette.

Let's go back to the beginning of Sister Felicia's story. She was born in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1929 and grew up in Rockwell City, Iowa. Joanne, her sister, joined the family a year and a half later. Her mother, Kathleen, had grown up on a farm. Her father's parents had immigrated to the United States and homesteaded in South Dakota.

When Sister Felicia started school, the Mercy Sisters staffed the parish school until she was in 8th grade. In August of 1942, our community, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, came to teach in the school. The first Sisters were: Sr. Marcia Risch (Grades 7-8; Superior), Sr. Ancilla Dychtowicz (Music), Sr. Christine Fister (Grades 4-5-6; Church), and Sr. Carmelita Lipps (Kindergarten, 1-2-3; Church, Catechism).

The students liked getting to know the new sisters. One of the things they always wondered about was what the sisters' last names were. The 8th graders did figure out Sister Marcia's last name because on the back of the classroom door was a calendar with the name, Risch Company from Random Lake, Wisconsin. They concluded that that had to be Sister Marcia's last name and they were right!

Another interesting story that Sister Felicia told about Sister Marcia had to do with a vocation talk that took place in her class in March. Sister told the girls to go home and tell their parents if they wanted to be a Sister. Sister Felicia said she did just that and the response she got was that her mother cried and her dad said, "Eat your lunch."

In grade school, Sister Felicia liked geography best, but did better in history. Math was not a strong subject for her, but spelling was easy. She went to public high school and was very involved in studies as well as extracurricular activities. She studied Latin, sociology, psychology and subjects that would prepare her for the medical field – biology, chemistry and other sciences.

Music was a very important part of her high school experience. She was a member of the band, glee club, mixed chorus and a sax quartet. The quartet and the band went to state competitions. Even though she was not very tall, she made the first girls basketball team at the high school.

Besides study and music, work after school at a grocery store kept her busy. Sister Felicia stocked shelves, clerked, and became produce manager after a while. The couple who owned the store were like surrogate parents to her. They sent her around town to get poppy donations to help Sister Felicia overcome her shyness. They also took her to the Grocer's Convention in Des Moines and, in addition to the meetings, she got to see stage shows that were not available in Rockwell City.

Sister's leanings toward religious life were nurtured by the sisters and parish priest who served as good role models. She attended Mass, Lenten Devotions, 13-Hour Exposition, Stations of the Cross, and made visits to the Blessed Sacrament in Church. In grade school, she helped the sisters after school and sometimes cleaned the Chapel.

Her parents were generous toward the sisters. Her mother baked for them. Her dad had an electrical business and he did electrical work at the convent.

As a junior in high school, Sister Ancilla took Sister Felicia and another student to Milwaukee

at Thanksgiving to see the Motherhouse. She remembers staying in one of the small houses on the grounds where Cardinal Stritch College students lived. Two of the girls hadn't gone home for the holiday, so they hosted the visitors from Iowa. Two sisters came over to the house to play games with the young girls. What was Sister Felicia's impression about this visit? "This is the place."

The summer after high school graduation, Sister continued to work at the grocery store, but she didn't have the \$50 dowry entrants had to bring with them when they entered the convent, nor the money to buy the items on the clothing list. So during the first two weeks of August, she detasseled corn and earned \$100, which covered her needs. Sister Felicia remembers August 28 of that summer very well. She arrived in Milwaukee and took a taxi from the train station to the convent. Looking back she smiles at how her trip ended. "The fare was \$4.95 and I gave the taxi driver a \$5 dollar bill saying he should keep the change!"

Sister Felicia wanted to be a sister and, at first, she said she couldn't believe she was actually in the convent. The daily schedule of prayer, study and work included recreation each evening. Two women in her postulant class had been in the Armed Services before entering. During recreation they often led the class in marching routines. Sister Felicia loved this because she had been in the marching band in high school. Especially memorable were the times they recreated in the valley next to the Motherhouse.

As a novice, Sister Felicia would learn some startling facts. She had asked her mother to send her Baptismal Certificate to complete her files. When she opened the envelope, she also found her Birth Certificate and was stunned that the names of the mother and father she knew were not on it. She would learn that before she was six months old her parents had adopted her, and 18 months later adopted her sister. This was a lot to accept and, during her next home visit, there were many questions asked.

Though Sister Felicia wanted to be a pharmacist, she was sent to teach second grade as a second



Above: The Sweet Adelines Harmoni-Q-Chorus.

Below: Certificate Sr. Felicia received for her stand against hatred.



year novice. This would be the beginning of a long career in the classroom. She holds a bachelor degree from Cardinal Stritch University as well as a master's degree in reading. She also has a master's degree in education and counseling from Marquette University.

When I asked Sister how she became interested in social issues and peace making, it was the example of her parents in part. Her mother was very compassionate toward the poor and very generous

in giving sandwiches to those looking for some food during the depression. Her dad accepted in-kind payments such as animals and other goods for his electrical work when people did not have the money to pay. Sister Felicia said she grew up being very sensitive to tragedies that others experienced in her small town.

In 1976, Sister Felicia had the opportunity to spend a summer at the 8th Day Center in Chicago, which focuses on issues of justice and peace. She worked with Sister Esther Hofschulte and learned about community organizing and how to reach persons in need and facilitate getting them help. Sister Felicia's hands-on task was to do phone interviews with persons seeking to get help with food stamps.

Her voice was often a catalyst in helping the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi further their commitment to justice and peace in active ways. In the late 70s, she met with several sisters for a weekend to help write a proposal for the creation of a Social Action Committee in the community. Later this became the Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, which still exists today.

In the 80s, Sister Felicia researched what the role of an ombudsman is and talked about this idea at community meetings. Gradually the idea took hold and discussions among the sisters at Regional meetings surfaced proposals for a formal reconciliation process. These proposals were brought to an Assembly meeting in January of 1987. The Assembly selected a committee to formulate procedures for the process; the Congregation was invited to give feed back and the final draft was approved in January 1989. The seed of an idea that Sister Felicia planted had come to fruition.

Her support extended to other groups as well. A Certificate of Appreciation was presented to F. Schlechter "in recognition of an important contribution to the ongoing fight against hatred and intolerance in America. The name shown above will be added to the Wall of Tolerance in Montgomery, Alabama, to provide inspiration to all those who choose to take a stand against hatred. Thank you for taking a stand."



(Left) Sue Wysocki, a religion teacher colleague at Prince of Peace. (Right) Sr. Ann Raphael Manthey, former religious education director in Sister's hometown of Rockwell City, Iowa.

Sister Felicia has found time to pursue fun endeavors as well. Her love of music and singing found a special outlet when she was a member of the Sweet Adelines Harmoni-Q-Chorus. The gift of a Hot Air Balloon ride at Lake Geneva was a wonderful experience of travelling in a different way. Cross word puzzles and reading the comics are relaxing for her.

Everyday Sister Felicia says that she prays for all she has tutored, trained, taught and tested. All of our retired sisters are remarkable in the ways they remember in prayer all those who have been part of their lives.

Now they look to persons like you to be a part of their lives and help with the costs associated with retirement. They were never paid adequate salaries nor given pension plans. But they believed that it is "in giving that we receive." As freely as they gave during their active ministry, may we invite you to give to them now?

Thank you for being an instrument of peace.

In St. Francis and St. Clare,

Marcia Lunz, of

Sister Marcia Lunz, OSF



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