



A Woman of Providence . . .

The reason she came is not why she stays says Joan Mullen, SP

A “sense of being led,” even when the leading took her away from the life she seemed destined for, is what brought Joan Mullen, SP, to dedicate herself to life as a Sister of Providence.

“I HAVE THE ASTROLOGICAL SIGN OF CANCER by birth and by nature,” said Joan in explanation of her initial belief that she was meant to be married. “I love hearth, home and children. I was going steady; I thought marriage and family were for me.”

She also felt a pull toward the nursing profession and thought of attending a nursing school in Northampton, the city in which her high school was located and which borders her hometown of Easthampton. However, her homeroom teacher, a Sister of St. Joseph, suggested she look at Providence

Hospital School of Nursing in Holyoke, a school sponsored by and staffed by the SPs. “I think you’ll be happier at The Providence,” she told her.

Enjoying personal contact

Joan loved her nursing school experience. Commenting, she said, “There were only seventeen of us in the class so it was very personalized. Sisters of Providence with whom we came in contact were interested not only in our education but in our personal growth as well.”

As she neared the end of her nurses’ training, another mentor, this time an SP, advised her “to take a look at what God is calling you to do.” She admits not being overjoyed with that suggestion. She responded by making private, daily visits to

church. She sat in the very last pew – praying, hard, that what she was beginning to suspect was her call, wasn’t.

“I WAS AFRAID of the demands of religious life and what I would be giving up,” she says in retrospect. Now, a Sister of Providence since 1958 and president of the Congregation, she says entering religious life “is really about an attitudinal change rather than ‘a giving up.’”

. . . has a prophetic stance and vision that enable her to reverence the past, live in the present, and embrace the invitation to share in the ongoing creation of the future.

**Joan Mullen, SP,
has lead the SPs
as president
since 2001.**



Today's women generally have more material goods and greater career, educational and lifestyle options than those considering religious life in the past. However Joan believes none of these things are serious deterrents to choosing life as a religious: "Material things and other externals are not real stumbling blocks to following the call. If the call is deep enough and you are open to it, stumbling blocks fall away."

"In religious life," she went on, "you have to say 'Yes' every single day, but you don't say yes on your own. Yes is a grace and it's our job to be open to that grace. You can get through any of the externals though some of them can be quite difficult, as long as you are willing to say Yes. It's a call, a call from God, and in the end, it doesn't matter how much you have or *think* you are giving up."

G OING ON, she said, "I'm an introvert. I have to take things in and process them in my depth, wait for them to speak. It has to feel right and when it does I follow it. When I say yes I do so wholeheartedly."

As an SP, she found, "The Congregation has given me an education I could never have afforded and experiences I never would have had and wonderful people to live with."

"I've always loved learning," she further shared, "all learning, from the intricacies of the body to those of the soul. Learning God is the most exciting study of all. While we sometimes think that we best experience God at peak moments in our lives, I have come to know that it is in being in the present moment, in the every day highs and lows that God speaks."

AS FOR HER VARIOUS ministries, she says, "I'm fortunate that I've loved everything I've been asked to do. I loved the hands on work and patient care of nursing and physical therapy. When I moved into administration, I loved the challenge of that ministry, as well. I

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can say in all honesty that I have never done or said yes to anything in religious life I've not been happy in."

In addition to the rewards of ministry, Joan says she has also been blessed in the relationships she formed with other SPs, particularly those with whom she lived. "I'm not Pollyanna" she said. "From time to time there have been interpersonal issues that needed working through, but on the whole, I've always lived with a very compatible group."

Sensing a special bond

Joan senses community and support from everyone in the Congregation, not just those she has lived and worked with. Sometimes those feelings are almost tangible. "There is a bonding among Sisters of Providence we often don't acknowledge enough," she said. "There is always someone to care for and care about when you are a member of a religious community; and, there is always someone to care for and about you. When you are going through a difficult time, for whatever reason, and another Sister stops you and says, 'I just said a rosary for you,' I can't explain what a boost that is." And speaking practically," she added, "we also have that wonderful sense of security that comes with knowing that we don't have to worry about such things as our housing, medical care or 'what we are to eat or put on'"

THE REASONS JOAN came to religious life, though, are not the reasons she stays. "I came for the ministry and a vague sense of the search. I stay because I want to find the treasure, to know as much as I can about what this God is about. I can't put words to it, but author Sister Sandra Schneider refers to what I am trying to express as 'the God quest.'"

"As I look back on my life," Joan concluded, "I truly believe I have been led every step of the way. For me, it's been, and is, a matter of saying Yes to the right circumstances and people in my life."



TO LEARN MORE about life as a Sister of Providence, please phone Ann Horgan, SP, at (413) 562-3627, write her at Genesis, 53 Mill Street, Westfield, MA 01085, or e-mail her at sisters@sisofprov.org. Or, visit the SP Web site at www.sisofprov.org.