



A Woman of Providence...

...stands against all forms of oppression and walks in solidarity and hope with oppressed people.

Choices mark path of religious vocation

Senga Fulton's story began with the realization that she didn't want to marry! Somewhere "around 1976 or 1977 something" was pulling her away from the life expected for most women her age. She was in her early 30s and working with children in a facility sponsored by the Sisters of Providence for emotionally disturbed and physically abused children. She was in the U.S. from Scotland attending college to earn a degree in social work.

"I had just come to the realization I didn't want to marry. It was like a strong pull. Something or someone was leading me some place else."

Not many would have pictured Senga becoming a Sister of Providence in Holyoke. She was a Scot, not an American, and wasn't Catholic but Presbyterian. She says, "My father was Protestant; my mother, Catholic. I attended a Protestant school in Scotland. The other schools were Catholic," and there was a rivalry between the two, sometimes to the point of unpleasantness.

Molding beliefs

She credits growing up in a Protestant-Catholic home and being educated in a Protestant school for her openness to people of all faiths and walks of life. "Once we start talking," she comments, "we find we believe the same basic values and principles of the Gospel message." The two she credits most for her advocacy for the homeless population, particularly women, are her mother and her "Granny."

"My mother was well-known and respected where I grew up. She was a union organizer and challenged the system to respect the rights of working women. And she improved working conditions in the thread mills."



Senga Fulton, SP

continues...

Senga's Granny "made herself available to people in the neighborhood. Neighbors sought her out when someone was dying or sick and she would go wherever she was needed." It was through her Senga was exposed—at an earlier age than most—to people's sufferings.

Always reaching out

While working in the Sisters' facility, Senga got to know a number of Sisters of Providence quite well. "They were always reaching out to me," she remembers, and when she needed a new place to live, one invited her to live in a rented house with six other Sisters. "The Sisters were very welcoming," she said. "Their community life was vibrant and they really cared for each other. Although everyone was working, we prayed together several times a week. We also attended congregational events and activities and read about Mother Mary of Providence, the community's foundress, and, of course, about God's loving providence. We enjoyed fun group things, too."

After two years, Senga knew she had a religious vocation. "It's a feeling you have," she explained. "You know in your heart it's right for you."

"I entered the Sisters of Providence because I saw them living out their mission of bringing God's compassion, hope and healing to people who were suffering. I felt God wanted me to be with the poor and since I entered the community I've been involved in several ministries with homeless women. I can't see me doing anything else."

Senga's mom was not too happy with her becoming a nun in the U.S. "My mother had been brought up in Catholic schools in Scotland and her memories of Sisters, unfortunately, were not warm ones. She felt she was not treated kindly and that the Sisters' lives were too harsh. She wanted me to have a different kind of life than the one she was envisioning if I became a nun.

She wanted me married," Senga acknowledged, "and, what made it more difficult for us was being three thousand miles apart. We couldn't just sit down together and talk it out."

So, her mom came to meet the SPs and although they passed with flying colors, she still asked Senga if she was really sure. "No, I'm still not sure," admitted Senga, winning her over with the statement, "But I feel I am being led and whatever way it turns out will be okay."

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—Sister Senga

Because she saw her daughter happy, "She was okay with my decision," noted Senga. "That's how she was; if her children were okay, she was okay."

Choosing the road less traveled

There are risks involved in making important decisions and deciding on religious life is no different. "If you make this choice," said Senga, "you are taking the road less traveled."

When Senga asked to enter the Sisters of Providence, the SP President told her she wasn't surprised. From her own years as a Sister of Providence she had observed, she said, that "God puts us in the right place at the right time."

Senga wants others to know God will do that for them, too.