

March 2018

Dear Friends,

We have now entered into a time when the Church invites us to focus more deeply on the meaning of Christ's Passion and death. These last two weeks of Lent (known as "Passiontide") are a solemn time in the Church when we may be able to take a more personal look at the events in Christ's life during moments of prayer, silence, and meditation. This practice may even reveal some surprising and meaningful insights as we continue our Lenten journey.

Sister Irene Zimmerman, featured in this month's vocation story, came from a large religious family. As a young child, she began to feel God's call to religious life, eventually following her aunts into the School Sisters of St. Francis community. Later, while teaching high school, she found her gift for writing poetry. Sister Irene's deep spirituality and love of God shine through her words. Perhaps those "special experiences of God's grace" she felt as a child eventually emerged in her beautiful poems that have such power to move and inspire.

Thank you, Sister Irene, for sharing your gifts that continue to touch the minds and hearts of so many.

Sister Beth Ann Baricevich, OSF
Vocation Minister

Women of Hope is the monthly electronic newsletter from the Membership and Relationship Team of the School Sisters of St. Francis for single Catholic women interested in exploring God's call in their lives. To learn more, please contact Sister Beth Ann Baricevich: bbaricevich@sssf.org or 414-550-0321.

Closeness to Jesus, Revealed Through Poetry

By Sister Ruth Hoerig

Religious life runs in the family for Sister Irene Zimmerman. She had six aunts who were School Sisters of St. Francis; two brothers who were Divine Word Missionary priests; an uncle who was a religious brother in that same order; and two uncles who were Jesuit priests.

"Our small parish in Westphalia, Iowa, contributed many young men and women to the priesthood and religious life," Sister Irene said. "Three of the seven girls in my high school graduating class entered religious life!"

"The sisters who taught in Westphalia were highly respected, and many were dearly loved," she said. "I remember processing through the cemetery and streets of our town, singing hymns and saying the Rosary. Those were special experiences of God's grace, for me."

Irene wanted to be a sister for as long as she could remember. "I was 21 years old when I entered, and the new Alverno College campus was just opening. The education I received at Alverno was beyond price. The community's charism of fostering the arts was another powerful influence. Singing in the sisters' choir made me feel that this community was where I belonged."

Sister Irene's first assignment was at Pius XI High School in Milwaukee, where she taught for 20 years. Sister Kevin Robertson, an English teacher at Pius, affirmed Irene's poetic gift and mentored her in the practical art of submitting her poems for publication. "Wonder of wonders, two of my poems were accepted on my first try."

Due to difficulty hearing, Sister Irene left the teaching profession and then worked in various other ministries as a secretary, a house mother and French tutor at a boarding school in Germany, and as a music minister and "poet in residence" at a retreat center in Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin.

"My spiritual life was somewhat hampered by my image of God," Sister Irene confided. "I knew in theory that God was Love, but I felt that God was an impersonal judge." Struck by St. Paul's statement, "Christ is the image of the invisible God," she resolved to heal her imagination by focusing on Jesus and writing poems about Gospel characters and events. That exploration resulted in two more books, *Woman Un-Bent* and *Incarnation*.

"The fabulous opportunities to develop my God-given gifts and my experience of living and working with other sisters have all contributed toward helping me grow into the person God is calling me to become," Sister Irene said. "My relationship with God, through daily prayer, has become my bedrock support and joy."

You are welcome to join us for liturgies, concerts, workshops and other events at St. Joseph Center. For a complete listing, please visit our website: www.sssf.org or find us on Facebook.

